

A HISTORY OF JEWISH LITERATURE

Volume IV

PART ONE

A HISTORY OF JEWISH LITERATURE

Volume IV

FROM 1880 TO 1935

PART ONE

by

MEYER WAXMAN



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To My WIFE
Collaborator and Critic
and
To My CHILDREN
MORDECAI AND NAOMI
This Volume Is Affectionately Dedicated.

PREFACE

In prefacing the last volume of *A History of Jewish Literature* the author finds that he need not offer an explanation of the character of his work, or of the method of his presentation of the material. All this was done before and no further comment is necessary. Nor will he apologize for the bulk of the volume, as the large mass of literature surveyed in its pages makes it self-explanatory.

However, a few remarks are necessary to point out certain features of the volume affecting both its scope and content. First, there is to be noted that while the legend on the title-page reads from 1880-1935 and the larger part of the literature dealt with was actually produced within this limited space of time, the two chapters dealing with Yiddish literature and with Jewish literature in European languages are more embrative and contain an account of those literatures from the beginning of the 19th century. This was done in order to afford the reader a complete and unified picture of the literary productions in those languages in which the divisions into epochs is not as marked as in the Hebrew literature. For similar reasons it was deemed advisable to devote to the tri-lingual American Jewish literature a separate book so that the reader may obtain a clear conception of the spiritual and intellectual development of American Jewry from early times to the present.

Second, due to the exceptionally large mass of literature produced by the Jews during the last fifty-five years, the author found his task exceedingly difficult and had perforce to limit himself, with few exceptions, to the survey of books and not to literary productions scattered in various periodicals or annuals. As a result a number of writers whose contributions may be of great value were regrettably but unavoidably omitted. For like reasons, the discussion of periodicals in other languages except in Hebrew was eliminated, and only few were mentioned more for their historical value than their literary importance. It thus came about that even such an important American Yiddish monthly as *Die Zukunft* was left out.

▼

Third, the author wishes to call attention to the fact that the year 1935, which was taken as a *terminus ad quem* for the purpose of affording him some historical perspective, imposed several limitations upon the scope of the work. Not only were writers whose works, no matter how valuable, appeared subsequent to that date excluded, but also works by writers, whose literary productivity was discussed extensively, which were written later were likewise omitted.

As for the judgment passed upon the works surveyed the author wishes to assure the writers that it was pronounced in a most objective and unbiased manner possible, as he was motivated solely by the impression he received from their perusal. And if any of the contemporary writers feels that the author erred or misunderstood him, all that he can plead, in his defense, is that "to err is human."

Thanks are hereby extended to institutions and persons whose services facilitated the preparation of the volume. Such are: The Library of the Hebrew Theological College; the Library of the College of Jewish Studies, both in Chicago; and the Hebrew Union College Library of Cincinnati, which supplied him with books; to Rev. M. Newman who lent the author many a volume; to Rabbi L. Mishkin and Mr. Isaac W. Jacobson for their assistance in the preparation of the bibliography and index respectively; to Mr. Ben Aronin for his renderings of the larger part of the Hebrew poetical selections; to his son Mordecai for reading a large part of the History and making valuable suggestions; and finally to his wife whose indefatigable energy in reading both the manuscript and the proofs with care and devotion exceedingly improved the volume in form.

The author also expresses his gratefulness to Drs. Albert K. Epstein and Solomon Goldman, Mr. S. A. Barnett, of Chicago, Rabbi Philip Groubart, of Fort Worth, Texas, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, for their assistance in partially financing the publication of the volume.

In conclusion, he wishes to offer, in all humility, thanks to God for granting him life and health thus enabling him to complete his work, and render a humble service to his people by chronicling the ramified expression of its literary genius.

MEYER WAXMAN.

Chicago, March, 1941.

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE (THE EFFECT OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT UPON LIFE AND LETTERS)

The early eighties of the last century mark the beginning of a great change in Jewish life, one which was bound to alter the course of that life and turn its intellectual and spiritual currents into channels different from those in which they had hitherto flowed. That change was initiated by the rise of Jewish nationalism, which henceforth impressed its spirit upon the age to such a degree that we are wont to characterize the last fifty years of Jewish history as the nationalistic period. By that designation, however, we do not mean to imply that the entire content of Jewish life of the last fifty years can be expressed in terms of the national movement. Such an assertion would not only be contrary to history but to the very character of Jewish life. The life of a people, scattered throughout the world and dwelling in many lands among many nations, cannot possibly be uniform and must of necessity be multi-colored and many-hued. Consequently, the application of the term nationalistic to the period under discussion merely signifies that the striving on the part of Jewish leaders for the strengthening of the national spirit among the masses and for the rehabilitation of Palestine as a Jewish national home became the leading factor in the life of the Jews and a center of influence in Jewish endeavor. Almost all activities during this span of time have been directly or indirectly related to the idea of nationalism, whether affirmatively or negatively. Nationalism thus was the primary cause of the centripetal movement in Jewish life which took the place of the centrifugal tendency, prevalent hitherto, as an attempt to solve the problem of

adjustment to a changed environment with which the Jew has grappled since the beginning of the Modern Period.

However, great as the change introduced by the national idea and movement was, it was by no means of a revolutionary character, but rather a result of the gradual development of internal and external conditions in the life of Russian Jewry. It was the vicissitudes of the Jews of that great center which caused the national idea—always latent potentially—to emerge as an active factor and to shape their destiny. In fact, the very Haskalah movement of the preceding period, which some consider antagonistic to nationalism, was in reality one of its progenitors. As was pointed out by us in the third volume of this work (Sec. 27), the Haskalah movement of Galicia and Russia, in spite of some deviations, was of a positive and constructive character. It is true that the *Maskilim* emphasized the need of general cultural values, and endeavored to widen the horizon of the Jews of the ghetto so that their life might be in accord with the general life of the peoples among whom they dwelt, but, with few exceptions, they did not minimize the spiritual and intellectual values of Jewish tradition. As noted above, Hebrew was to them not a means but an aim in itself, and the development of its literature a goal toward which they strove. It is also true that the hope for emancipation was a dominant factor in the Haskalah literature, but at no time were its moving spirits ready to buy that coveted emancipation at the expense of important beliefs or practices. In their demand for reforms in the Jewish religion, the attacks were, on the whole, concentrated on excessive severities (*Humrot*), but not on the essential phases of Judaism. It was for this reason that, when the hopes for emancipation of the Jews in Russia seemed in the late seventies as far removed as ever, and when the reaction in Russian circles indicated a change in the attitude of official Russia towards the Jews, these very *Maskilim* were the first to initiate the centripetal movement. The clear-sighted among them, such as Smolenskin and others, openly confessed to the failure of the Haskalah ideology.

It was not the confession on the part of the enlightened, however, which constituted the important service of the Haskalah to the cause of Jewish nationalism. On the contrary, it was the very introduction of general cultural values into Jewish life which contributed to the spread of the national ideal among the masses. We must not forget that Jewish nationalism in its modern expression, in spite of its origin in the

Messianic hopes nurtured by the Jews through the centuries, is essentially a secular movement, both in its method and philosophy. As such, it could not possibly have taken root in the circumscribed life of the ghetto. A change in that life, resulting in the widening of the horizon of the Jew, in the increase of general knowledge, and in the mastery of technical sciences, had to take place before the national strivings could turn into a movement on a large scale and of a practical nature. To this change the Haskalah contributed much, though the share of the pressure exerted by external conditions upon the Jews must by no means be minimized.

However, while the Haskalah, by causing a change in the attitude of the Jews towards secular knowledge and the practical aspects of life, prepared the ground for the rise of a national movement, it was primarily a combination of circumstances which gave the real impetus to the birth of that movement and made it an active factor in Jewish life. The first of these was the strengthening of the spirit of nationalism in the life of the European nations during the sixties and seventies of the last century which came as a result of the wars for the unification of Italy and Germany, on the one hand, and of the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, on the other hand. These wars and their political results imbued the nations of Eastern and Western Europe with a different spirit than that which had prevailed during the first half of the century. The liberalism of that age was gradually receding and its place was being taken by a spirit of chauvinism which fostered in each nation a belief in its superiority and in the excellence of its own culture to the exclusion of any foreign elements and influences. These percussions and strivings in the general life at first evoked hardly an echo in Jewish life. The Jews of Western Europe were still intoxicated with their newly-won emancipation, and the rise of the tide of nationalism only caused them to proclaim more loudly their identification with the peoples among whom they dwelt, while the Jews of Russia under the spell of the temporary liberalism of the sixties still hoped to obtain that coveted equality in the near future. Yet this change in the spirit of the nations did not pass without leaving its impress on Jewish life. A few clear-sighted men, such as Moses Hess (Sec. 116) and others, saw the trend of the times, and reflecting upon the situation of their people, came to the conclusion that the solution of the problem lay in the revival of Jewish nationalism and in the return of the Jews to their ancient land. These rather weak stirrings within Jewry itself were

augmented by sporadic attempts on the part of liberal Christians, especially in England, to formulate plans for the return of Palestine to the Jews and to present them before the governments of Western Europe. Though these efforts came to naught and affected the Jewish masses little, yet they facilitated the reception of the national idea when the time for its emergence into life came, inasmuch as it was not entirely unheard of before.

The second factor that made for the rise of Jewish nationalism was that the Haskalah movement had lost its driving force as a result of the changed conditions in Russian Jewish life. By the beginning of the seventies of the nineteenth century, the battle of the enlightened for the spread of secular knowledge among the Jews had almost been won. With few exceptions, the greater part of the Jews in the larger cities became convinced, on practical grounds, of the necessity of providing their children with a secular education. Moreover, the new law of 1874, which granted special rights to graduates of high schools (gymnasias) and universities by shortening their term of military service, precipitated a rush on the part of thousands of Jewish parents to enter their children into these schools so that they might enjoy the benefits which a higher education would confer upon them.¹

This turn of events, however, formed only a minor phase of the crisis. A graver one was precipitated by the disappointment of the leaders of the Haskalah in its fruits. During the forty years that had elapsed since the struggle of the enlightened for the introduction of secular studies in Jewish life began, there had arisen a new generation of young men and women who followed the advice of the leaders and became saturated with the general culture. But they did not fulfill the hopes of their teachers for they did not become that ideal type of Jew which the latter hoped to evolve. They were grossly materialistic and utilized their knowledge and learning only as a means for improving their economic and social positions. Most of these enlightened were professional men who were eager to be accepted in Russian society on equal terms, and in order to attain this aim, they estranged themselves from Jewish interests and became thoroughly Russianized. As a result, an incipient movement of assimilation set in among these young intellectuals and conversions became quite frequent in these circles. A large number of Jewish students and of the enlightened youth were

¹ See on this change in the Jewish attitude, Mordecai ha-Kohen, *Mé-Ereb 'Ad Ereb*, Vol. I, pp. 1-20.

attracted by the socialist, or as it was then called in Russia, the nihilist movement, and devoted their energies to the freeing of the Russian people from the yoke of the Czarist government, even to hazarding their lives for the cause. Jewish youths participated in the numerous terrorist acts which took place in the late seventies. These actions proved clearly the indifference of the young intellectuals, professionals, and the rising generation in general to Judaism and to the situation of their brethren, a fact which brought bitter regret to the champions of the Haskalah.

Another phase of the crisis was the total frustration of the hope of the enlightened not only for emancipation but even for an appreciable amelioration of the state of the Jews in Russia. On the contrary, the situation was aggravated in the late seventies by an intensification of hostility towards them. As a result of the publication of the anti-Semitic *Book of the Kahal* by the convert Brafman which appeared at the end of the sixties and the libelous pamphlets of the degenerate monk, Lutostansky, the attacks against the Jews in the Russian newspapers increased, and several of them, including the important and semi-official journal, *Novoe Vremya* (The New Times), made these attacks a permanent feature. The first of these anti-Semitic writers represented the Jews in his book as a separate group of people who cling tenaciously to their peculiar customs and are ruled by the secret *Kahal* which urges them to acts injurious to the interests of the government and the Christian religion. The second revived the ancient blood accusation and attempted to prove the existence of such practices by doctored citations from Jewish writings. The libels were given credence not only by the masses but by some Russian officials who charged the Jews of Kutais in Russian Caucasus, in the year 1878, with the use of Christian blood for religious practices. The accused were freed, but the belief persisted, and Russian society became surcharged with hatred towards the Jews. These events shocked the enlightened of all parties and many of them, confessing their error, began to preach both in Hebrew and in Russian for a return on the part of the younger generation to their people, urging them to cultivate Jewish knowledge and Jewish values.

All these factors, however, while they contributed towards the idea of Jewish nationalism, were not sufficient to convert it into an active force in Jewish life. A stronger impetus was necessary to shape this idea, which was still in the process of fermentation in the minds of a

few chosen spirits, into a view of life sponsored by many as an attempt to solve the grave problem. That impetus came in the form of the pogroms which broke out in Russia in the years 1881 and 1882.

This series of outrages which lasted for a whole year, beginning with a pogrom in Yelisovetgrad in the south of Russia, in the spring of 1881, and thence spreading to numerous other cities including Warsaw in Poland and ending with a pogrom in Balta, which aroused the conscience of all liberals in Western Europe to protest against the outbreak of barbarism, completely confounded the intellectual leaders of Russian Jewry. In the hearts of some there still lingered a spark of hope that at some time in the future the Russian people would accept the Jews as their equals and that the coveted emancipation would at least be partially realized. That spark was extinguished by the grim reality of the pogroms. To aggravate matters, the notorious May laws of 1882 were promulgated by the Minister of the Interior, Count Ignatiev. This series of discriminations, which placed a large number of limitations upon the economic activity of the Jews and narrowed still more their free movement within the Empire, revealed the intention of the government to persecute the Jews and to force their exodus from the country. In fact, official encouragement for emigration was given by representatives of the government. The masses, however, did not wait for such advice, and moved by fear and a feeling of insecurity, began to flee Russia and thus initiated the great mass emigration of the eighties of the last century. The question arose, Whither? The greater number turned their eyes to the land of freedom and opportunity across the ocean, the United States; but the cry, "Let us return to the land of our fathers, to Palestine," was also heard.

The first steps in the activities of the *Hobebé Zion* (The Lovers of Zion)—the name which the bearers of the national ideal then assumed—are too well known and there is no need to dwell upon them. Suffice it to say that they were painful and slow and were greatly hampered by the confusion that reigned in the minds of the masses and their leaders; yet the spirit that animated them had the force and vigor of a great striving and gradually it pushed its way to dominance. Its strength, however, was derived not from clearly formulated theories, for there was only one attempt made to develop the nationalistic movement on a theoretical or philosophical basis, namely the one made by Dr. Leon Pinsker in his brochure, *Autoemanzipation*. Strength came primarily from the latent historical and emotional force inherent in the

idea itself. The literary propaganda which was carried on in the first years of the national movement was concentrated more on arousing the age-long love for Palestine than on the theoretical justification of the primacy of nationalism in Jewish life. Part of the literary energy was devoted to the demonstration of the practicality of the rehabilitation of Palestine, for immediate amelioration of the economic situation was the primary aim of the emigrants. The sponsors of this movement felt that they did not introduce anything new in Jewish life, but that they came to restore a pristine ideal to its legitimate right, namely to be realized in actual life.

Still the progress of the national movement was not as rapid as its champions had hoped. The times were turbulent; the years from 1882 to 1896, which constituted the first stage of the movement, were trying ones for Russian Jewry. The economic situation, aggravated by the hostile attitude of the government and its new enactments constantly grew worse. The question of improving the situation of the Jews, huddled in compact masses in the Pale of Settlement and hemmed in by numerous limitations, was still the question of the day. The national idea could not, therefore, under the circumstances, enthuse the large masses, especially since its practical phase suffered several setbacks by the slow development of the colonies established in Palestine, as well as by the temporary suspension of immigration into that country by the Turkish government in the early nineties. The progress was limited to smaller strata of the people who were more idealistically inclined. In addition, the national ideal found also some opposition during its early stage in certain intellectual and literary circles. It had, therefore, to struggle for a dominant place in Jewish life in order to exert that influence which it later exercised upon the various expressions of Jewish activity.

The opposition expressed itself in various ways. Some of the veterans of the Haskalah, whose quarrels with the ultra-Orthodox were of long standing, saw in the movement a tendency toward reaction. They expressed the fear that the establishment of colonies in Palestine would lead once more to the entrenchment of fanaticism, since the sponsors of the movement, in their striving for conciliation, would undoubtedly yield to the authority of the Rabbis. The leader of these enlightened was the poet, J. L. Gordon, who would not forego his opposition to the orthodox Rabbis even in the face of the new events. He openly expressed his fear of the new trend and placed as a condition for the

obviation of the possible danger of the rule of fanaticism the introduction of religious reforms.³ Others, sceptical of the ability of the movement to solve the problem of the immediate economic need of the masses, contended that it was injurious to divert even a part of the limited energy of the Jews to the realization of a plan which would prove of little practical value. They argued that the ills in Jewish life were so numerous that their cure demanded the entire energy of all public men, and consequently, any diversion of that energy to impractical endeavors, however ideal, would cause the neglect of the more important questions and would only increase the demoralization of Jewish life.⁴ Still other followers of the Haskalah of a conservative trend of mind did not exactly oppose the national idea but voiced their fear of its secularism, arguing that it aimed to change the essence of Judaism which is religious. They claimed that the only permanent bond which united the Jews in the past and would continue to unite them in the future is religion for which the nationalists were endeavoring to substitute the secular national spirit grounded primarily on emotion and enthusiasm, qualities of an unstable character. They regarded this type of nationalism as a foreign importation borrowed from the nations among whom the Jews live, and in consequence, they were apprehensive of its effects. The spread of the movement, they asserted, might weaken Jewish faith and even sanction the non-observance of religious practices, since a mere declaration of adherence to the national movement would entitle one to be called a good and even a devoted Jew. In addition, argued they, the movement would lead to an excessive adoration of Jewish virtues and thus divert attention from the curing of the ills which had crept into Jewish life.⁴

It is, of course, understood that these men, *Maskilim* who were saturated with Jewish knowledge, did not oppose Jewish nationalism as such. In fact, they constantly reiterated that "A people which does not possess a national hope does not deserve to be called a people."⁵ It is the form it had assumed rather than the content which they opposed. The fact, that many of the leaders and spokesmen of the young movement who directed its destinies and impressed it with their spirit were

³ J. L. Gordon in *ha-Meliẓ*, 1882. Nos. 12, 33.

⁴ Bernfeld in his article, *Haxut ha-Kol* and Israel Bernstein in *Kenesset*, Vol. I, pp. 2-7.

⁵ Z. Epstein in a series of articles in *ha-Meliẓ*, 1881, Nos. 45, 46, 50 and No. 3, 1882; N. Sokolow in *ha-Zefirah*, 1883, Nos. 7, 20, 35.

⁶ N. Sokolow in *ha-Zefirah*, 1883, No. 2.

repentant assimilationists and strangers to the cultural heritage of the Jew, repelled them and aroused their suspicions.

These very suspicions which caused the mild opposition on the part of the moderately enlightened aroused a much stronger opposition on the part of the leaders of the ultra-Orthodox. They instinctively recognized in this new movement, which spoke of Jewish unity on behalf of an historical ideal, a greater foe to their view of life than the Haskalah. The fact that some of the leaders of the national movement were men ignorant of the Torah, indifferent to religion and its observances, was considered by the representatives of the old order as portents of great danger to Judaism as they understood it. They felt that this movement was bound to change the conception of Jewish life more radically than the Haskalah and introduce a new criterion both of Jewishness and Jewish leadership. They also sensed their own weakness in grappling with the new problems which presented themselves and which the new movement attempted to solve. As a result they hesitated to coöperate with the secular leaders in the Palestine work, fearing that this toleration might undermine their own leadership. Besides, they were also apprehensive that the new life in the colonies would not be conducted along religious lines. Due to these fears, there arose great opposition to the national movement in the ranks of the orthodox masses, though it was not articulate since the Hebrew press as well as the Russian-Jewish press were in the hands of the enlightened and the nationalists. In actual life, however, this opposition was strong and formed one of the most serious obstacles the new movement had to overcome. Only a few of the leaders of Orthodoxy were broad-minded enough to rise above these suspicions, and join the ranks of the promoters of the national movement.

Still, in spite of opposition, the movement progressed and gradually became a notable force in Jewish life, especially in literature upon which it exerted great influence. Its steps during the first stage of its development which terminated in 1897 were, as said, slow and painful, for many were the obstacles in its way. In addition to the opposition, there were numerous practical difficulties to be met. The early adventures in Palestinian colonization were not successful because of the lack of funds and proper human material. But the experiment was not abandoned; a number of settlers clung to the soil in spite of failure, and soon help came. Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris, who later became known as *ha-Nadib ha-Yeduah* (The Noted Benefactor),

placed at the disposal of the new settlement some of his millions. With this financial help, though it was not always wisely employed, colonies began to increase, the number of settlers to grow, and by the middle of the nineties of the last century there arose a nucleus of a new Jewish center different in type and culture from the old settlement. The legitimization of the activities of the *Hobebé Zion* by the Russian government in 1891 strengthened the movement. Of great service to the movement was also the influence of the Hebrew literature of the time. There existed a mutual relation between the two, the latter drawing much of its strength from the rise of the former and in turn acting as a stimulus to its expansion.

The greatest factor in the strengthening of the movement, however, was the continual change which was going on in Jewish life in Russia during the period under discussion. The spiritual walls of the ghetto, even in the smaller towns, were gradually crumbling. The development of industry which forced a large number of Jews to become factory workers thus drawing them out of their economic isolation, the need of acquisition of secular knowledge, the improvement of transportation by the construction of railroads which brought the inhabitants of the smaller towns in contact with the larger Jewish centers in the cities, the effects of the immigration of thousands of Jews to the United States—all these widened the horizon of the Jew and broadened his view of life. There could, therefore, be no wide rift between the enlightened and the ultra-Orthodox, for the large majority were anxious to impart to their children as much secular knowledge as possible. The rush of the parents to enroll their children in the secondary schools and universities which began, as mentioned above, in the early seventies, did not cease even after the issuance of the May laws which curtailed the percentage of Jewish students in these institutions. On the contrary, the greater the difficulties, the greater was the effort on their part to force their way into the schools, for the path of higher education led, as a rule, to economic amelioration and to social distinction both among Jews and non-Jews. The fact that the Gentile nobility and also the government officials considered the Jewish professionals their equals heightened their prestige also in the eyes of their brethren. The latter felt even flattered when these worldly professionals condescended to interest themselves in the affairs of the local Jewish community, and in such cases often yielded them the leadership. In fact, a number of these professionals who possessed some Jewish education were even

pressed into service as government Rabbis.⁶ Thus piety was no more a necessary condition for participation in Jewish activity nor a requisite for leadership. The conception of Jewishness was broadened and thus made possible the acceptance of the idea of the national movement which transferred the center of Jewish endeavor and life from religion to national consciousness. The fear of the early opponents of the movement that the secular concept, which is inherently implied in that idea, would ultimately weaken the hold of the Torah and religion upon the Jews was in a measure justified. Still, it could not be otherwise, for the broadening of the concept of Jewishness constituted a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of nationalism, as without it there would have been an impassable gulf between the observers of the law and the large numbers who emancipated themselves from its yoke, and then, of course, there could be no national movement deserving that name.

There was also another factor which contributed in a measure towards the entrenchment of nationalism in Jewish life. This was the incipient spread of socialism among the youth. The rise of industry in the Pale of Settlement brought numerous young Jews and Jewesses into the factories, who were immediately urged to align themselves with the proletarians of the world in their striving for the social revolution. This appeal was readily answered, for the working conditions were poor, hours of labor long and wages small, and within a short time, the illegal movement—for socialist activity was forbidden in Russia—spread among the laboring masses of the Pale. On the other hand, the Jewish students of the universities were likewise taken with the ideals of liberty, both political and economic, and with the notion of a Utopian state of society which socialism held out, and they became the leaders of the working masses. This radical tendency was at the time universalistic and rabidly anti-nationalistic and anti-religious, and in addition was fraught with danger, for it was revolutionary and its adherents were persecuted by the government. The national movement was then under the circumstances welcomed even by intelligent orthodox leaders as a healthy antidote against socialism, as they hoped that it would help to divert the youth from that alluring ideal.

The national movement found itself, as said, in the middle of the nineties of the last century, legitimized and fairly entrenched in Jewish life and it began to exert a dominant influence upon the litera-

⁶ For the office and function of government Rabbi see Vol. III, p. 251, note.

ture of the day. But it had not yet become the sweeping force which it was destined to become. It still lacked the gripping interest of a great ideal which takes hold of its adherents and stirs them to heroic deeds. In its practical phase, it was limited to the slow settlement each year of a few hundred Jews in the ancient land, and while its roots went deep into the Jewish past, its visible fruits were meager. It had neither the halo of a great vision nor the breadth of a popular striving. It was destined, however, that a change should come, and this change, which marks the beginning of the second stage of the movement as well as an epoch in the history of the period, turned the placid current of the *Hobebé Zion* into the wider, broader, and swifter stream of Zionism.

The appearance of Herzl's work, *The Jewish State*, in the year 1896, created a stir in Jewry. Its immediate result was the opposition on the part of some spiritual leaders of Germany and Austria to the ideas expressed in that book wherein Jewish nationalism is firmly asserted, and the proposal of a plan, rather Utopian, for the creation of a Jewish state worked out in detail. They were aroused to protest against the views and plans and enunciated once more the oft-reiterated doctrine that the Jews are merely a religious group and not a nation. These honest, well-meaning, but short-sighted persons, trained in the ideals and aspirations of the generation of emancipation, still cherished the belief in the gradual progress of humanity towards a universal brotherhood and looked upon Judaism as one of the factors chosen by Providence to bring about this desired Messianic age. The anti-Semitic movement which developed in Europe in the eighties and nineties of the last century only shocked and pained them but did not shatter their belief in the ideals of their youth. They looked upon it as a temporary disease caused by the false ideas of nationalism which swept over the peoples of Europe, and they viewed any attempt to strengthen that pernicious feeling in the House of Israel not only as erroneous but as a dangerous admission of the claims of the anti-Semites who asserted that the Jews were alien elements in the body politic of the peoples among whom they dwelt. Small wonder then that they took fright at the fantastic dream outlined in *The Jewish State* with clearness and precision. They were shocked at the very boldness with which the author, a well-known person in the journalistic world, spoke of the possibility of establishing a Jewish state of whatever dimension and form. They did not believe in the possibility of even a partial realiza-

tion of that plan, but somehow they felt intuitively that this little booklet, Utopian as it might be, foreshadowed the rise of certain activities in Jewish life which would put the ideology to which they clung so tenaciously to a severe test, and hence their consternation at its appearance and their antagonism to its ideas.

It was the same boldness and the magic of the high-sounding phrase "Jewish State" which affected in an entirely contrary way a large part of the masses of Eastern Europe. To the nationalists of Russia, Rumania, and Galicia, the German booklet unrolled the panorama of a distant vision, glimpses of which they secretly nourished in their hearts. It also captivated the imagination of many who had hitherto been indifferent to the movement. It dangled before them a great hope and imparted to the idea a glow and glamor unknown before.

Greater than the idea, however, was the personality of the man behind it. To the East-European Jew, the appearance of Herzl, a famous journalist, who consorted with the great and powerful, who had access, it was rumored, to the courts of Europe, as champion of the national idea, invested the movement with the glamor and halo of the heroic. The response to his call was instantaneous and enthusiastic and the old *Hobebé Zion* societies in the East-European countries immediately submitted to his direction. The belief in his leadership possessed something of the glow of the old Messianic hope. This was fanned by the political activities of Herzl who brought the national movement out of its narrow confines into the larger arena of world politics. Every trip of the leader to Constantinople or to any other capital of Europe, every meeting with potentate or prince was heralded in the ghettos of Russia and Poland as a step towards the realization of the great dream. Still greater than the effects of the political activities of Herzl were his attempts to perfect the organization of the movement. It was this step primarily which changed its character and converted the modest organization of the "Lovers of Zion" into a wide social force invested with a political character. The first Zionist Congress, convened in Basel in 1897, constituted one of the outstanding events in modern Jewish history, both in the effect on the progress of the national movement and in its influence upon all aspects of Jewish life. It was the first time that both the plight and the problem of the Jew were placed before the great world and were given a political status. It was there that the foundations of the Zionist organization, repre-

senting the Jews of all countries, were laid, the first of its character in the entire history of the Jews in exile. It thus expressed the will of world Jewry, and though to a great degree potentially rather than actually yet it possessed in the eyes of the outside world more authority than any other Jewish organization.

It was these features of the movement, the international organization, the establishment of an annual Congress which assumed the character of a world Jewish tribunal and parliament, and the attendant administrative bodies, which gave it stability, force, and vigor and gained for it the adherence of the masses. It retained its strength even after the political hopes began to fade, even after the repeated attempts on the part of Herzl and his followers to obtain from the Sultan the charter or an indication of favor toward their plan had failed and had brought disappointment to the leader causing him to temporarily abandon his plan and turn his eyes toward Uganda. Moreover, it survived even the crisis of the death of the founder and the loss of his magnetic influence. Briefly, it became the dominant force in the Jewry of the world.

The entrance of Zionism into Jewish life as a vigorous force contributed greatly towards a change of the inner character of that life, especially in its spiritual aspect. It conduced more effectively towards the secularization of Jewry than did the older type of nationalism expressed in the *Hobebé Zion* tendency. Its very political basis and its character as a movement organized in the manner and fashion of similar movements in the general world produced that effect. The *Hobebé Zion* often emphasized the religious side of the national ideal and frequently appealed to the people for support on the ground that the *Yishub Erez Yisrael*, i.e. the settlement of Palestine, is one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts enjoined upon the Jews. The Zionists, however, stressed mainly the alleviation of the economic situation of the Jews and the escape from the hatred of the anti-Semites. Furthermore, the fact that the new form assumed by the movement demanded a new type of leadership versed in the ways of organization and political activity and that a large part of its adherents came from the ranks of the assimilated who were strangers to Jewish tradition, practice, and culture, lowered still further the standard of "good Jewishness" and limited it to mere interest in Jewish affairs, economic and social. Also due to the fact that Zionism became a mass movement, the leaders of the national movement became also centers of in-

fluence in other phases of life and thus leadership in Jewry passed slowly into the hands of men who had emancipated themselves from the yoke of the Law.

This phenomenon, while it was undoubtedly injurious to the best interests of Judaism, as it unconsciously sanctioned freedom from Jewish tradition and cultural values, was also to a degree beneficial. It broke down the narrow barriers between the factions in Jewry, and made possible real unity among the Jews. Zionism thus served as a training school for the masses, teaching them the forms of social organization which were utilized in other phases of life and preparing them for the life of a people rather than that of a religious group or that of single communities. This service should not be minimized, for it stood the Jews in good stead during the vicissitudes of their life in the last twenty-five years. Political Zionism, however, brought about even more positive results. We must not overlook the fact that the adherents of the movement were composed of two elements, those who came from the ranks of the assimilated and those who hailed from among the masses, and though the former assumed, to a certain degree, the leadership, the latter were more numerous and had not only the strength of numbers but also that of a moral force, derived from the fact that the vigor of the idea lay in its historical origin. It followed that the national movement, even in its new aspect of Zionism, could not but become instrumental in arousing a need for a national culture as well as for all other attributes necessary for the carrying on of a national life. It followed also that those Zionists who returned to the fold from the outside world were also influenced by the spiritual side of the movement in which they participated and came closer to Jewish life, though they seldom submitted to its form. Besides, the movement, due to its spread in larger and wider circles, became a staying force for the youth in an otherwise disintegrating Jewish world.

The movement in its new aspect likewise aroused fresh opposition among the ultra-Orthodox who were not slow to see the effects of the change of leadership. But this opposition expressed itself not, as in the previous stage of the development of the national idea, in passive resistance, namely in refusing to join the ranks of the Zionists, but in articulate fashion. The orthodox circles also began to employ the new weapon of literature in defense of their ideas as well as in attack against their opponents, and they gave voice to their views in one or two periodicals established for that purpose.

On the other hand, the political character given to the movement by the founder of Zionism and his strict adherence in the earlier years of its development to that program counteracted this opposition and facilitated its spread among certain orthodox circles. The clear-sighted among the spiritual leaders of Orthodoxy saw the import of the new tendency introduced in the national idea, and taking advantage of its form of organization which allowed for the autonomy of groups and factions urged their followers to participate in Zionist activity in large numbers. Thus early in this century, the Mizrachi faction or party, which has since become an important constituent of the Zionist organization, was born. The participation of the Orthodox was at first limited to the political organizational and propagandistic phases of the movement. Their purpose was to place a kind of check on the movement so that it might not go to extremes and transgress the bounds of tradition. Their influence was thus a salutary one and preserved the historical character of Jewish nationalism.

The spread of Zionism in orthodox circles conduced to a further secularization and modernization of the social life of a large stratum of orthodox Jews, and henceforth it became more heterogenous and ramified. This, in turn, widened also their view of cultural activity. The need to defend the views of a nationalism imbued with the Jewish spirit forced them to alter their own conception of Jewish education, to widen and broaden its scope not only by recognizing the value of secular knowledge, but also of such branches of Jewish knowledge which hitherto had been excluded from the ordinary curricula of Jewish education, as history, the Hebrew language, and kindred studies. In brief, Orthodoxy entered the field of Jewish culture and literature.

An impetus for the spread and stabilization of the modern type of Jewish culture was also given by another phase of the movement, by its practical activities in the settling of Palestine. In the first years of Zionism, the political factor held sway. The leaders still hoped for the speedy realization of their hopes, and much energy was spent on the consolidation of the organization and on propagandistic activity. As a result, the actual colonization of Palestine was neglected, but, even during these years, it was not given up entirely; its tempo was merely slowed. A gradual increase in the number of Jews emigrating to Palestine and a slow improvement of the colonies was going on all the time. However, with the fading of the political dreams in the early years of the present century and with the death of Herzl in 1904,

Zionism took on a new aspect. It did not renounce the political aspirations, but turned once more to the practical phase, and as a result, the colonization of Palestine was resumed with great force and vigor. The first decade and a half of this century saw the establishment of a number of new colonies, the founding of the largest Jewish city, Tel-Aviv, and numerous other endeavors which presaged the ultimate development of a great Jewish center. Due to political upheavals in Russia in the years 1905-1914, which resulted in numerous outbreaks against the Jews in many cities and towns, a new wave of immigration into Palestine took place (The Second Aliyah). The immigrants were a new type, consisting of young men and women who constituted the first generation of *Haluzim*. They did not come there to buy land and establish colonies but to work and redeem the land by their labor. They were imbued with a spirit of radical nationalism, devotion to ideals, and were zealous to evolve a new type of life—new not only in form but in content as well. These factors contributed towards the development of cultural values in the Palestine center, brought about the revival of the Hebrew language as a medium of communication, and created an elemental need for a literature in that language which, in turn, directly and indirectly influenced Jewish life in general and served as an impetus for cultural and literary activity.

We have dealt at length with the development of the national idea and its corresponding movement during its first two stages because it constituted the leading spiritual and social current in the life of the Jews of Eastern Europe during that span of time. It was not, however, the primary factor in the great change which Jewish life in that center underwent in the three and one half decades which had elapsed from the early eighties to the World War. In fact, the real transition of the Jews of Russia from ghetto life to that of the modern type was accomplished not during the *Haskalah* epoch but during the time indicated. The *Haskalah* only stirred the surface of life but never penetrated its depths. The principal factor in the emergence of the Jews from the ghetto psychosis was the continual mutation in the political, economic, and social aspects of Jewish life. This process, a resultant of numerous and ever-changing factors and causes cannot possibly be analyzed or compressed by the historian in a short survey of the period unless he devote himself to a special study of the subject. As an illustration of the complexity of the process, we will cite only one phenomenon which took place within the time mentioned, and that is the mass emigration.

From the year 1881 to 1912 there emigrated from the Russian Empire to the United States close to twelve hundred thousand Jews. A large part of the immigrants left behind them families and friends with whom they were in constant communication. May we not conclude that the exodus of such a large number of Jews and their subsequent settlement in a country, where the conditions were totally different from those in their former home, was bound to leave a deep effect upon the people who were left behind and to introduce significant changes in Russian Jewish life.

We therefore chose to limit ourself to the description of the important contributory factors of the change and not attempt to delineate the underlying causes which, on account of their complexity and fluidity, elude analysis. Of these factors nationalism was, as said, the most important. But there were also minor currents which influenced Jewish life in the great East-European center. They, like nationalism, were really manifestations and effects of the upheaval and fermentation which were going on in that Jewry. Still, as all such middle links in a long chain of causes and effects, they in turn became motives and reasons for numerous spiritual, intellectual, and even economic phenomena.

2. MINOR CURRENTS

The first of these lesser currents was the Jewish socialistic movement. The socialistic and revolutionary tendencies—in Russia the two were identical, for every socialist was simultaneously a revolutionist who endeavored to overthrow the Czarist regime—which began to spread among the Jewish youth in the seventies, received a temporary check in the years 1881 and 1882 on account of the pogroms, but made headway again in the late eighties, reaching considerable proportions in the nineties. This time the movement began to spread among the workingmen whose number, due to the increase of industry in the Pale of Settlement, was constantly growing. The leaders, however, were still the intellectuals, recruited mostly from the ranks of university students. Since the center of gravity was shifted from the political to the economic field, though the former was not neglected, the response was great and the number of socialistic groups increased appreciably. The change in the type of followers of the movement also altered its character so that it became distinctly Jewish, though more externally than inwardly.

At first, the leaders, who were on the whole estranged from Judaism and imbued with the spirit of cosmopolitanism and assimilation, endeavored to emphasize these phases of the idea, but due to the fact that the mass of followers were still saturated with the spirit of Jewishness in which the traditional form of life was a component, that attitude was bound to change. The first concession made by the leaders to their followers was the carrying on of propaganda in the Yiddish language, the only one the larger part of the members understood, and the party organ, *Die Arbeiter Stimme*, was published in that language. When in 1897 the League of Jewish Workingmen of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, popularly known as *Der Bund* was formed, the struggle for a change of view began. At the first convention of the *Bund*, the principles of cosmopolitanism were enunciated, but soon demands for national expression were made, and some leaders even advocated that the Jews be given national autonomy in a liberated Russia. This was voted down at the convention of the *Bund* in 1901, though it was recognized that the concept of nationality applied also to the Jews, a concession of no mean importance, since the tendency of Jewish socialists was always to insist on internationalism and class struggle. The demands of the nationalists, members in the party, were, however, not to be silenced, and indirectly influenced by the spread of Zionism among the masses, they grew bolder and pressed their claims until they were finally granted at the convention in 1905. A resolution was then adopted to demand "national cultural autonomy" in a Russia free from absolutism.

The idea of nationalism thus penetrated into the ranks of the socialists, but of a different type and character. It had little to do with the historical form of the idea and still less with Jewish tradition to which the socialist movement was really opposed. It was primarily limited to insistence on the retention of the Yiddish language as the language of the masses, and to a degree on its development as a cultural and literary agency, inasmuch as under autonomous conditions of Jewish social life it was destined to become the language of instruction in the schools. Likewise, that nationalism included also the maintenance of certain forms of Jewish folk life. On the other hand, it was violently opposed to religion, tradition, and Zionism, and the renaissance of Hebrew. The Jewish socialists looked upon all these strivings not only as obsolete but even as pernicious, as interfering with the class struggle and the coming of the social and economic revolution. That a move-

ment of this type contributed greatly towards the secularization of Jewish life and even towards divesting it of its traditional type and form is quite evident. Yet even this form of nationalism contributed somewhat to spiritual Jewish life, for the workingmen, imbued as they were with the socialistic ideas, could not emancipate themselves from the environment in which they lived. The diluted nationalism of the *Bund*, therefore, had to absorb some of the Jewishness of the masses. It could not be limited to merely making Yiddish a medium of expression or instruction, but rather had to endow it with a literature which perforce, due to the emptiness and prosaic character of the contemporary life of the proletariat, had to draw upon the more complete Jewish life of the past. Thus indirectly an impetus was given to a development of a Yiddish literature which absorbed cultural elements of a traditional and religious character.⁷

Once a reconciliation was effected between socialism and a diluted nationalism, a further step followed which brought the two closer together. This was the founding of the Socialist-Zionist party or the *Poalé-Zion*, which henceforth became not only an integral part of the Zionist organization, but ultimately played a great role in the realization of the aims of the movement.

The spread of the Zionist idea among the workingmen, a stratum of society hitherto unaffected by it, exerted a strong influence upon the movement and indirectly upon Jewish life. It was this stratum, which consisted, on the whole, of the youth, many of whom were trained in revolutionary activities and were innured to danger and self-sacrifice, that supplied the first *Haluzim* (pioneers) to Palestine. The nationalism of these pioneers was historically based in so far as it acknowledged the supremacy of the Hebrew language and strove to develop cultural values; but, on the other hand, it exhibited an indifference to the forms of the traditional life and in particular to their religious content.

Another current of lesser importance as far as its embodiment in a definite movement is concerned was the one known as the "Diaspora-autonomy nationalism," the theoretical basis of which was supplied by the historian, Simon Dubnow, in the early years of this century. It differed greatly from the national autonomy of the *Bund*, not only in that it excluded socialism altogether from its scheme but in the very essence of the national idea it advocated. Like Zionism, it adopted historical nationalism, though with modifications; but it refused to

⁷ For illustration of this trend, see Ch. VI.

consider Palestine as the only solution of the Jewish problem. On the other hand, it claimed that the solution lies in the reconstruction of Jewish life on national lines in the various centers of the Diaspora. Its main demand was that the nations recognize the Jews as a national minority and grant them autonomy in the management of their social and cultural affairs, especially where the Jewish settlement is compact and numerous. The basis of such autonomy should be, according to the propounders of the theory, the Jewish community (Kehillah) of the secular type, and not as in the past, the religious. The various communities of each country should be united in a general council, and these again in a union of the Jews of the world, administered by annual congresses. Such autonomy would imply the devising of ways and means of preserving the special forms of social life and primarily a distinct system of education calling for two types of schools, the national in which the language of instruction should be the one employed by the Jews (in most cases it meant Yiddish), and the general. These were the strivings of the proponents of this theory. No further details of its application, especially in its social phase, and its relation to religion and tradition, were given.

It is sufficiently evident that this form of nationalism was a thoroughly secularized one. In fact, its promulgators, though basing their theory on the past experiences of the nation in the Diaspora, distinctly stated that they strive towards a complete secular form of life. No antagonism to religion or to Zionism was expressed; it was merely asserted that the former is only a part of the Jewish culture, and not the most important part, and that the strivings of the latter are inadequate, for Palestine can only be one Jewish center among many. It did recognize the cultural importance of the Hebrew language, yet since Yiddish was the language of the large masses of Russian Jewry, its leanings, more implied than expressed, were towards that language.

At the time of its appearance, the movement made little headway and did not become a real force in Jewish life, but its effects became more evident during the turbulent years of 1905-07 when the Russian people first made the attempt to shake off the yoke of Czarist absolutism and establish a constitutional government. In those years the Jews hoped that the new order of government would bring them not only emancipation but also semi-autonomous privileges. The idea of cultural autonomy became for a while an active force in their life. It was espoused by a large number of Jews, both radical and Zionists, and

temporarily became the question of the day. Various parties were formed, each of which interpreted the idea in different light. The differences between the parties were often hardly discernible and the leaders were forced to employ hair-splitting arguments to justify their existence. Yet, so widespread was the interest aroused by the revolutionary spirit of the time in the political aspect of life that every theorist found a sufficient number of adherents to form a party. The phenomenal spread of the idea of national rights and cultural autonomy was, however, of short duration. The terrible pogroms which broke out in the years 1906-1907 and the triumph of the Russian reaction completely shattered the dreams of the Jews of obtaining such extensive rights in Russia. The movement, though, left an impression, inasmuch as the intense political activity and interest which it aroused among the masses gave a still further impetus to the secularization of Jewish life and narrowed still more the scope of influence of religious leadership. It also increased the spread of new ideas among the youth by advocating radical changes in social and economic life as well as a changed attitude towards religion and tradition, for in Russia the demand for political changes went hand in hand with the demand for corresponding fundamental changes in other departments of life.

Furthermore, the national autonomy movement was only paralyzed by the victory of the reaction but not killed. It was bound to be resuscitated during the War when hopes for a new order in Eastern Europe were aroused once more, and with the close of the War, as is well known, an abortive attempt was made, with the help of American Jews, to realize it.

3. *THE WAR AND POST-WAR PERIOD*

The World War constitutes a definite landmark in the history of the Jews in the present century. In fact, its effects on the political, social, and economic phases of the life of any of the belligerent nations were not as marked as on that of the Jews whether they were combatants or non-combatants. It practically changed the whole order of life of European Jewries and produced a number of complicated problems with the solution of which world Jewry is still grappling and will probably continue to grapple for another half a century. First of all, it broke up the greatest and most important Jewish center in history, namely that of the Russian Empire, where up to the close of the War seven million Jews dwelt, and thus interrupted the further normal de-

velopment of a large part of Jewry which drew strength from its numbers; second, the Russian Revolution put an end to the activities of three million Jews as Jews and separated them from their brethren; third, the rising tide of anti-Semitism, one of the bitter fruits of the post-War European life, paralyzed the activities of the other four million Jews who now live in Poland and the half dozen smaller states formed out of the debris of the domain of the Czars. Similar fundamental changes took place also in the other Jewries of Eastern and Central Europe, such as Austro-Hungary, Rumania, and Germany.

It is not the intention of the writer to chronicle the events of Jewish history during the last quarter of a century nor even attempt to give an adequate survey of the situation. What is aimed at is to point out the salient effects of this complicated and tragic situation upon Jewish life in general and upon its spiritual, intellectual, and literary activities in particular. The first of these effects was suffering. The intense suffering of the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe which resulted from the factors mentioned above left its impress upon all phases of Jewish life. When struggle for existence, for safety, and security of life and limb was the order of the day, when the most pertinent question in the daily routine of the masses was the satisfaction of hunger and other elementary needs of the body, little else could be expected than a concentration on means of amelioration of their material position. Small wonder then that spiritual and intellectual endeavors declined during this period in almost all the lands of the East-European Diaspora, and that literary activity suffered great reverses. If they did not cease altogether and if cultural strivings were still in evidence, it was due to the remarkable vitality of the Jew and to his historical urge for knowledge and learning.

The second effect was the change in the attitude towards life on the part of the youth. Due to the social unrest caused by the Russian Revolution and the new trends in the general life, the center of interest shifted from the old values to economic and social values. The Jewish youth in the East-European countries who passed through the horrors of the War and the suffering of the post-War period, and who by a concatenation of circumstances found themselves largely deprived of economic security, could not but be dissatisfied with the existing order of things and be imbued with a desire for change. They were thus amenable more than any other youth to the influence of the current radical political and social ideas; and while they were not always, except

in Russia, actual participants in the attempted realization of these ideas, the assertion of the Gentiles notwithstanding, that tendency was nonetheless quite in evidence and the change in the evaluation of forms of life was marked.

It must not be supposed, however, that this change also resulted in an anti-nationalistic trend. On the contrary, the tendency toward a secular national life in the Diaspora was strengthened and augmented during the War and post-War periods. Towards the end of the War when various dreams of a new political order as the outcome of the great struggle began to sway the minds of many among the oppressed peoples, the Jews, encouraged by the Balfour Declaration, also entertained hopes of attaining national autonomy in the lands of the East-European Diaspora. The old idea of cultural autonomy was revived and movements for its realization with the help of the imminent Peace Conference were set on foot in those countries as well as in the United States. Largely through the efforts of the representatives of the latter Jewry at the Peace Conference, a part of the strivings for national rights was guaranteed by the minority clauses inserted in the treaties with such nations as Poland, Lithuania, and Rumania. In the first years after the War, an attempt was made by some of the governments to live up to the treaties and the Jews of several countries received semi-autonomous rights, at least as far as the educational system and the language of instruction were concerned. Little Lithuania even appointed a special minister of Jewish affairs. But soon the rise of race hatred and the change of spirit in European politics altered matters, and not only were these rights curtailed, but a more immediate problem faced the Jews, namely how to secure safety of life, limb, and economic existence. Besides, reality proved the baselessness of the national autonomy idea and the difficulty of its realization. As long as the Jews form no majority in any one strip of territory, both in the cities and the villages, there can be no such autonomy, for it is bound to clash with the interests of the general population.

The few years, however, during which the Jews enjoyed a wider measure of rights, some of which were of a national character, left a cultural deposit in life. The national-autonomy idea—not in the Dubnowian sense—which was, as we have seen, of an extremely secular character and had little to do with the historical forces of Jewish life, always served as a haven of refuge for those elements in Jewry who divested themselves of tradition but could not or would not assimilate.

It was these elements, whose numbers increased as a result of the War and post-War conditions, who became the leaders in activities affected by the semi-autonomous rights, especially in the field of Jewish education. When the attempt failed, the tendency for maintaining a semblance of a national life remained, expressing itself mainly in the cultivation of Yiddish and its conversion into a literary language and a depository of cultural values. To these "Diaspora nationalists," whose nationalism is, on the whole, but a thin veneer, Yiddish forms almost the sum total of Jewishness and is therefore intensely cultivated. But since it is difficult to limit the boundaries of a cultural activity, for fields are contiguous, the workers in the field of Yiddish often made contributions of historical and folkloristic value. Thus, as a result, an impetus was given not only to the development of Yiddish literature but to several kindred cultural subjects.

For a time the broadening of Jewish rights in several East-European countries gave rise also to an extended Hebraic cultural activity which was expressed in the establishment of a net of schools; and it seemed for a time that this type of culture was about to take a new lease on life, but later events extinguished such hopes, with the result that it fell far below Yiddish culture in activity and vigor.

The third factor which greatly influenced Jewish life during the period was the Balfour Declaration and the subsequent developments which resulted in the establishment of a Jewish center in Palestine numbering today close to half a million Jews. However, it is not numerical quantity which is of importance but the qualitative character of the life developed in that center. Jewish life in Palestine is to all intents and purposes a national life. It is so by virtue of the feeling of the settlers that their efforts to rehabilitate the country are operating not only to improve their individual economic situation, as was the case with Jewish immigrants into other countries, but to better the position of the nation as a whole. Every step of progress in any phase or form of life made in Palestine is considered not alone of local import and value but of national significance and of deep interest to the Jews of the Diaspora. The national character of that life is further enhanced by a change in the economic activity of the Jews as expressed in the shifting of its center from commerce and industry to agriculture, resulting in the conversion of a desolate land into a flourishing and productive country; by the building and establishing of cities and villages, and not as hitherto, settling in places founded by others; and finally by

the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language and the creation of many cultural institutions and values.

All these accomplishments gave rise to a number of currents and tendencies in the spiritual and intellectual life of Palestinian Jewry, and ultimately influenced to a greater or lesser extent the Jewries of the Diaspora. Not only were the bounds of literary activity extended to satisfy the needs of a growing national life and not only was literature promoted so that it became an expression of that life, but it also changed, under the influence of conditions, in character and type. The outstanding feature of Palestinian life is the overwhelming influence, entirely disproportionate to its numerical strength, of the laboring class. This is explained by the fact that the progress achieved is due primarily to the pioneers who were imbued with a spirit of idealism, and consequently they came to exert a great influence on the growth and development of that life. If we add to this the fact that this group which is, on the whole, possessed of a great degree of class consciousness is, as a result, more adaptable to organization, we can readily understand the power it exercises in a social life where the other groups, likewise immigrants, do not possess the strength of conviction to express their views and attitudes towards life in an organized manner. It is true that Palestine possesses also a Jewish population whose mode of life has changed but little from that of the preceding generation in its conservatism, and that this element was partly augmented by new arrivals from the ranks of the orthodox Jews of Germany, but this element is, on the whole, of a non-productive character and occupies an unimportant place in the new type of life.

This evident trend contributed to a still further secularization of Jewish life, a secularization which, though much closer to the traditional form, yet possesses all the characteristics of such a tendency.

We have thus reached the end of our survey of this most heterogeneous period in the history of our people, one which witnessed the actual metamorphosis of Jewish life from a type in which religion held the center of attention and forms fixed and hallowed by tradition prevailed, to one which, on the whole, can be termed secular. I said on the whole advisedly, for the life of a people such as the Jews scattered throughout the world can by no means be uniform, and there are still Jewries in certain countries which maintain the former mode of life. The character of the life of the leading Jewries in the most important centers distinguished by their numbers and activity has, however,

passed through that transition, and though the old type has not been banished and religion still occupies an important place, it is no more dominant and has yielded supremacy to other forces of a secular nature. We will now proceed to describe the general character of the literature produced during this age which was to a greater or lesser degree the expression of the colorful and constantly changing life.

4. *THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD*

From what was said in the preceding pages, it is evident that the task of determining the general characteristics of the literature produced during this rather short but heterogenous period in Jewish life is not an easy one. It is really not one period but a conglomeration of several into one. The changes which took place during that span of time were so drastic, the intellectual and spiritual currents generated by conditions were so different from each other that their reflections in literature were bound to engender variety rather than unity and heterogeneity instead of homogeneity. Yet, nonetheless, it is possible, overlooking the lesser differentiations and the minor deviations, to delineate certain characteristics which distinguish the literary productivity of the period as a whole.

That the bulk of this literature is primarily a secular one has already been indicated and needs no more emphasis, for it is not only a continuation of the literature of the preceding period which already possessed that characteristic, but it was produced by a type of life which was, as we have seen, constantly becoming more and more secular. Nor do we need to reiterate the fact that this literature is, like that of the earlier one, a record of movements which aimed to adjust Jewish life to a changing environment. But this very similarity also makes for its difference, for since the movements during the latter part of the modern period were different in character, it follows that their record also differs, and it is this which gives the literature of the period under discussion its distinguishing tone and nature.

As we know, the leading movement during the last fifty or sixty years was the national one. That movement is composed of two elements which, though essentially opposed to each other, are yet parts of one whole. These are the centrifugal and the centripetal tendencies. If we take the type of life lived by the Jews from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple to the beginning of the Modern Period

as the standard or the central core of Jewishness, then any deviation from it or any attempt to change its values would be considered a centrifugal tendency, and on the other hand, any attempt to preserve them would constitute a centripetal one. In the standard type, religion held the central place and all values of life bore a direct relation to it, while nationalism as such was not distinguished from it but merged with it forming a single whole. The national ideal which became a factor in Jewish life in the eighties of the last century aimed to equalize the life of the Jews to that of other nations, and its underlying slogan, though not always expressed, was *Niheyē ke-Kol ha-Goyyim* (Let us be like other nations). It thus aimed to do away with the uniqueness of Jewish life, but not with its distinctness. Such an equalization implied not only the acquisition of a land but also all the other characteristics of a modern nation included under the term national culture. It thus emphasized numerous values which hitherto were of minor importance assigning them the place of older values. In other words, it endeavored, as was pointed out (Sec. 1), to change the criterion of good Jewishness, and as such displayed a centrifugal tendency. On the other hand, by its emphasis on the primacy of the need to preserve the Jewish people and its culture, and by emphasis on the unity of the past and present, and on the completeness of Jewish life, it called forth feelings of love and reverence for tradition and Jewish values, and it thus evinced a centripetal tendency.

The two tendencies are not only reflected in the literature of this period but actually shaped it and gave it the heterogeneity and multiplicity of forms which it displays. From the point of view that Jews are to become a nation like other modern nations, sharing in the general civilization and creating a modern culture, it followed that literature, which is an important ingredient in every national culture, should be considered, not as in the earlier Haskalah period, as a means for the spreading of enlightenment among the people but as an end in itself. It is true that the germs of this view can be traced to the second Haskalah period, for the better class of writers of those days likewise considered the literature they created a valuable addition to the spiritual wealth of the people. But on the whole, it was expressed in a vague, indefinite manner and by no means was there much emphasis placed on the value of secular literature. This view came to full fruition only in the succeeding period when the principle of equalization of Jewish life to that of other nations was tacitly accepted. It was then that the place of

literature became exalted and to a certain extent encroached upon the position held by the Torah.

In consequence, literature acquired a dignity which it had hitherto not known. It lost the apologetic tone which had characterized the entire modern literature, both Hebrew and Yiddish, during the earlier period. The writers began to feel their importance as creators of a part of the national culture and as producers of useful values, and as such they spoke with a freedom and confidence unknown before in Jewry. The dignity which the secular literature assumed and the confidence felt by the writers brought about an increase in its influence. That all these qualities constantly increased as the period progressed and in the measure that Jewish life continued to be secularized goes without saying.

A second result of this view was the heterogeneity of this literature. Since literature came to take the place of other values formerly prevalent in Jewish life, it followed that it must express all tendencies of the modern Jews who had already left the ghetto and had different conceptions of life and letters. To them literature was no longer, as to the generation of the Haskalah, a matter of style and dexterity in the manipulation of Biblical verses or a means of arousing the Jews to an appreciation of general values, but they claimed that it must have a content of its own and possess the quality of aesthetic and artistic satisfaction. These new readers and writers were already saturated with the spirit of the European literatures and with the tendencies prevalent in them at the end of the last century, and they sought to have these very tendencies reflected also in their own literature, whether Hebrew or Yiddish. It is on this account that the literature of the period contains several currents corresponding to those prevalent in the European literary world, such as realism, often in extreme form, naturalism, and even decadentism and eroticism. All such tendencies followed from the fundamental conception that if the Jews are to be like other nations, their literature must consequently adopt the standards and values of other literatures. There was, of course, much imitation, but of an entirely different type from that displayed by the writers of the Haskalah period. The latter imitated slavishly the external traits, while these writers really assimilated the current general tendencies and attempted to express them in their own productions, though with slight modifications. These attempts, though they emanated from the national idea and were permeated by good intentions, were in their essence of a

centrifugal character, inasmuch as they harmonized poorly with the elemental Jewish spirit as expressed in the life of the nation during the greater part of its history.

Simultaneously, there was felt in the changed attitude of the writers towards Jewish life the effect of the centripetal phase of the national movement which inculcated reverence for all expressions of the Jewish spirit in the past. They no longer sought, as in the Haskalah period, to depict its defects in lurid colors, but on the contrary, endeavored to point out its finer and nobler qualities. There was a concerted effort made to arouse love for the national heritage. Novelists, essayists, and poets began to delve into the manifold manifestations of Jewish life in order to discover its hidden beauties for the purpose of utilizing them in artistic creations. And the more they studied that life, the more were its ideal phases revealed to them.

The result of this attitude and scrutiny was the creation of a current in the literature of the period which we may characterize as the Romantic. Instead of polemizing against Ḥassidism, as the writers of the previous generation had done, the nationalists began to glorify it and cast a halo around its founders and leaders. They overlooked the narrowness of its conception of Judaism, its antagonism to secular knowledge, and its superstitious practices, and emphasized instead the glow of its emotionalism, the deep religiosity of its leaders, the optimism and the joy of life expounded by its teachers, and the love of man so frequently expressed in the aphorisms and utterances of the *Zaddikim*. The *Zaddik* who, almost throughout the Haskalah literature, figured as the villain of the novels and short stories, who utilized the credulity of the masses for his own aggrandizement and employed all means to maintain his rule over the Ḥassidim, was now pictured as the superman and as the ideal type. The excessive enthusiasm of the Ḥassidim was portrayed as the effervescence of great emotional souls in their thirst for life and participation in its joys.

This glorification of Ḥassidism and the finer features of the life of its devotees was only one phase of the literary current which we denominated the Romantic. The national idea carried with it, besides the complex of thoughts and feelings usually included in the general term nationalism, also an underlying conception of democracy. In a renascent nationalism which is still in the process of becoming and which is not yet expressed in different forms in life, the masses assume undue importance. They are considered the custodians of the national

life in its pristine purity and consequently their life forms a favored topic for writers who constantly draw upon it for their novels, sketches, and poems. This tendency was in great evidence in Jewish literature. Furthermore, proclivity for democracy was not only fostered by the national idea but was nurtured, as we have seen, by numerous other factors which emphasized the importance of the common people.

The result of this complex of factors and tendencies was that there emerged a wide and broad current of folk literature which reflected a number of varying hues and shades containing several eddies akin to each other in some respects and different in others. The common characteristic of all was the veneration of the masses which was expressed in the attempts at depicting their life in its various manifestations. We thus have a reverse situation in the literature of this period from the one prevalent in that of the Haskalah. In the latter, the enlightened, the *Maskilim*, played the heroic parts, while the masses were portrayed as superstitious and prone to commit wrong at the behest of their leaders. In the former, the man of the people, whether laborer, or teacher (Melamed), or petty tradesman, may be portrayed as the hero of the novel or the sketch. It is true that the intellectual, or rather the student, who has now taken the place of the *Maskil* was not banished from Jewish literature. He still occupies an important place but rather as an individual type and not, as in Haskalah literature, the representative of a class. Besides, that place was primarily reserved for him in the realistic current and not in the romantic or folk literature in which the masses and their leaders or the common man occupy the place of honor.

It was not alone the national movement and the democratic spirit which fostered this positive attitude towards folk life. It was nurtured and very largely by the changed conditions of Jewish life. The younger generation, having practically emancipated themselves from the ghetto, no longer had to wage a struggle for the acquisition of secular learning. On the contrary, many of them were oversaturated with the aims and ideals of the general culture and often found them bare of content. On returning once more to their people and coming in closer contact with its life, it appeared to them in a brighter light and in more rosy hue than it actually was. Since the younger writers never submitted themselves again to the rigors of religious life, they only observed its finer side, and hence its glorification. There was undoubtedly much exaggeration in their portrayal, but on the whole, it was a salutary

current and its influence cemented the relation between the older and the younger generations whose modes of life were constantly diverging.

It must, of course, be understood that not all writers belonging to that current overlooked the realities of life and limited themselves to the description of its nobler features. There were a number, among them the most able, whose keen eye saw its shadows as well as its lights. However, we have merely noted the general trend and direction of the current and do not imply that there were no exceptions. In fact, even these more realistic writers evinced great sympathy for the masses and there is hardly a tone of polemics or malicious satire or even of superiority in their stories or descriptions.

The struggle between the two opposite tendencies, described above, was to a large extent concluded with a victory for the centripetal. After various forms of literary expression of a general nature, among them also the ultra-modernistic, were tried out, there was noted during the several decades of the present century a decided inclination on the part of the belles-lettres writers to turn more and more to the traditional life of the erstwhile ghetto as a source of material for their works. There were exceptions, of course, and the new life in its numerous vicissitudes during the present century also found expression in novels and short stories, but the works of the first type exceeded the latter both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The reasons for it are not far to seek. Contemporary Jewish life, on account of the exceptionally difficult circumstances under which it was lived in all the lands of Eastern Europe where the bulk of the literature was produced, as well as because of the conflicting changes and movements within it, did not afford sufficient material for original artistic creations. The life of the younger Jews, idealistically motivated though it was, was torn and shattered, ever under the stress of conflicting emotions and always without fast moorings. Such a life produced many tragic types which were ably portrayed by some writers, but did not yield to creative treatment. Second, most of the writers, though skilful, did not rise to the height of a general philosophical view which would enable them to present that life in its entirety, nor did they possess sufficient psychological insight to penetrate to the depth of the tragic soul of the modern young Jew. Some of the writers who tried their hand at such portraiture distinguished themselves to a degree in presenting that type and especially in delineating his "split soul" (Kara she-ba-Leb)—of which we will hear more anon—resulting from his

growing up under the spell of two cultures and under two environments, the Jewish and the general. But these attempts were, on the whole, limited to short sketches and revealed only episodes and incidents in the life of that type, and no more.

On the other hand, Jewish life of the past, which in many parts of Eastern Europe extended into the present, presented a more complete aspect and its types were perhaps less tragic but more human, possessing solidity and integrated personalities. In addition, they harmonized with their environment and could thus be portrayed together with it. Besides, the writers, though emancipated from the ghetto, were still saturated with its ideals and strivings and were bound to it by memories and early education, and they thus could still fathom its depths and project its features.

Probably for the very same reason, we note a peculiar phenomenon in the Hebrew literature of the period, namely that the poetic production excels the prose in creativeness and originality. This is exactly the reverse of what took place in the modern European literatures where creativeness is expressed primarily in works of prose. Because of its very qualities, that of imagination, intuitive insight, and the glow of emotion which constitute its essence, poetry could not draw for inspiration upon the shattered contemporary life of the Jew, while it found ample motives and soul-stirring episodes in the past of the nation, in its tragic fate in a modern world, and in the grand spectacle staged by the national movement in its form of political Zionism. In general, it can be said that while several poets portrayed, and with great success, love of nature, or the glowing emotion of love, or the thirst of the human soul for beauty, and similar impulses, in fine poetic form, the creativeness of Hebrew poetry lay in its national and not in its individual aspect. In fact, the greatest Hebrew poet of the period was by almost unanimous consent declared to have been the late Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik whose strength is expressed entirely in his national poetry.

All the features and traits hitherto described touch primarily upon the qualitative character of the literature; but there is another distinguishing feature in the productivity of the time which differentiates it from that of the Haskalah, and that is its ramification into different species. The national movement which emphasized the importance of literature as an integral part of the culture of the nation necessarily caused a widening of its scope and an emergence from the narrow lim-

its into which it had been hitherto confined. The literature of the *Has-kalah* was permeated, as we have seen (Vol. III, Chas III, VI), mainly by two strivings on the part of the writers, to introduce an appreciation of human values of an aesthetic character, and to widen the horizon of the Jew by urging him to pursue secular studies. That literature was therefore primarily limited to *belles-lettres*, or essays and books which endeavored to demonstrate the desirability of change in Jewish life. Only late in that period did there begin to appear works of a different kind which deal with other topics, such as literary criticism or problems of the day.

In the introduction of that ramification, both tendencies of the national movement, the centrifugal and the centripetal, joined hands. The desire to be like other nations called forth expressions of ideas and tendencies prevalent in the general culture, including the various social, economic, and philosophical trends. On the other hand, the impulse to glorify and to cherish the national heritage stimulated the study and the exploration of the past and led to a survey of the accumulated treasures of Israel. As a result *belles-lettres* forms only a part of the literature of the period, while the essay, in its various forms, the critical, sociological, historical, and philosophical outnumbers the works of fiction and poetry. Besides, we must not forget that in Eastern Europe, the center of this literary productivity, there was still a large number of readers, mostly of the middle class, to whom Hebrew was the only medium of information on general matters. In addition, literature served as a means of propaganda, and since the national movement was inherently connected with the complicated conditions of life, it followed that the stimulation of the national revival was accompanied by an analysis of Jewish life in its various phases. As a result an extensive literature of an informative and publicistic character was produced. Some of these works had ephemeral value, and some are of a permanent nature. From the above, we can gain a glimpse of the extent of both the qualitative and quantitative heterogeneity of the literature which we are about to describe.

This ramification constantly increased with the gradual development of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. There, in that center, one factor of tremendous influence was added, namely that Hebrew became a spoken language and the medium of instruction in the education of a new generation. We will not discuss at present the detailed effects

of that factor on the Palestinian literature and on that of the Diaspora, but we wish to emphasize its general influence on the expansion of the literature of the period irrespective of the place of production.

Undoubtedly, the survey calls for a concluding discussion on the question whether this great mass of literature produced in a comparatively brief span of time created new values which enriched Jewish life permanently, as well as for an estimate of these values and how far they amalgamated harmoniously with the fundamental expression of the Jewish spirit. However, the drastic changes which took place during the period, the breaking up of a great Jewish center, that of the former Russian Empire, on the one hand, and the building up of the Palestinian center where life assumed an entirely different aspect, on the other hand, make even a relatively detailed discussion and estimate impossible at this stage of our work. We will have to defer it to the end of our story when all important manifestations of the extensive literary productivity will have been more or less revealed to us. For the present, it will suffice to say that the literature, notwithstanding some minor currents of a decided centrifugal nature, was of a positive character and that it created important values. These are: First, a love for or at least an interest in Palestine on the part of a large number of Jews throughout the world; second, a positive attitude towards the Hebrew language and towards its literature as elements of an expanded and modernized Jewish culture; and third, a general stiffening of the will to live in spite of all the difficulties besetting the path of the Jews in their struggle for survival. That the influence of these values is not uniform in the different settlements and that there is a profound distinction in this regard between the Palestinian center and those of the Diaspora is self-evident. We are dealing with a people whose life is of a unique nature, a people which continues its existence under most extraordinary circumstances, subject to the pressure of different cultures, and is called upon to make various adjustments. To the life of such a people, no definite rules can be applied, and its forms and expressions cannot be pressed into a mould. Consequently, there are large groups of Jews in different countries whom the new values affected but little because of their estrangement from the entire complex of the ancient heritage, while there are other groups whose life is still saturated with the old values and who therefore have little need of the new. Yet these values we are speaking of are an integral part of the present day Jewish

life in its entirety, and notwithstanding the wide variations in the temper and character of the groups, no single group is completely immune from the influence of these values.

On the other hand, much less can be said about the harmonious amalgamation of these new values with the fundamental expressions of the Jewish spirit. There were attempts made to fuse the two, but on the whole, there seems to be a dissonance between the old set of values and the new, though they are not mutually exclusive, which breach has greatly impaired the creativeness of modern Hebrew literature.

The literature hitherto spoken of is, as was noted, almost entirely secular, as the religious element finds in it comparatively little expression. Only here and there do we meet with such attempts. These, however, were limited to such literary branches as the essay, historical research, and philosophical speculation, but are not met with in belles-lettres, either in fiction or in poetry. In the latter, it is true, we do meet expressions of appreciation of the religious life of the past and panegyrics to the Torah, but even these are not saturated with religious emotion. It is rather a curious phenomenon that the people which produced the Bible could not draw upon it for inspiration in its poetic expression in modern times and did not adapt the lyrical spirit of the "Book of Books" to modern forms and strivings. The explanation may be sought in the gulf which was created between the modern and the older phases of Jewish life, the conditions of which need a deeper analysis than can be given here.

However, the literary productivity was not altogether limited to these secular types. Rabbinic and kindred literary works were still written in large quantities, and the number of collections of Responsa and Novellae is exceedingly great, even if it does not equal that of the preceding period. Qualitatively, however, they fall much below the standard of the former productions. There is no outstanding code or even an authoritative collection of Responsa which possesses much creativeness. There is undoubtedly keenness of mind displayed in these books, and at times we note an ingenious application of the Law to modern conditions in some of the Responsa, but all follow in the beaten track and very little that is new has been produced. Yet, we must admire the remarkable tenacity of Rabbinic learning which is still alive and active even in an environment which is not only unfavorable to its development but quite often antagonistic to its entire approach.

5. *CENTERS OF JEWISH LITERATURE*

The greatest and most productive literary activity was centered, during the larger part of the period up to the World War, in the lands of Eastern Europe, primarily in the Russian Empire. It was there that Jewish life expressed itself in the most complete and diverse manner and the literature, mainly in the Hebrew and Yiddish languages, reflected that life in all its vicissitudes. The bulk of the literature written in these two languages was, therefore, produced in that center, although literary activity was going on simultaneously in several lands of Western Europe and in the United States. But this activity was of much lesser importance, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and to a certain degree, was influenced by the tendencies and views dominant in the literature of the main center. In addition, much of the literature produced in the West-European countries was written in European languages. The East-European countries can, therefore, be considered the literary center of the Jews during the pre-War epoch.

The War, as we know, brought confusion into the life of the Jews of Eastern Europe and broke up that great center of Jewish population, the Russian Empire, and caused a pronounced decline of literary activity. The first decade of the War and post-War years was one of intensive struggle for existence on the part of the East-European Jews and literature could not flourish in an environment of suffering and misery. The needs of the body had to be satisfied before those of the spirit. Abortive attempts were made to transfer the literary activity, especially in the Hebrew language, to Germany, but because of unfavorable conditions with little success.

In the few years of recovery, during the third decade of the century, the literary output was increased, but for various reasons, mainly in the Yiddish language, while glory departed from Hebrew letters in the lands where it had flourished.

Meanwhile, however, during that period a new center arose in Palestine. The position that Palestine has assumed in Jewish life since the Balfour Declaration, and its increase in population, and most significantly the fact that Hebrew became a living language, brought about the establishment of a literary center in a very short time. It was the first time in millennia that there came into being a comparatively large aggregation of Jews to whom Hebrew became the natural

means of expression. Yet, all these causes would not explain the rise of that center in so short a time were it not for one other factor. Palestine became the Mecca of the majority of Hebrew writers who flocked thither, considering it the most desirable habitat. However, the very fact that the literary talents were not indigenous to the country but came from the outside world, fully fashioned and determined in character, stamped the Palestinian center with a peculiar nature. It is a center in a quantitative sense but not in a qualitative. In fact, the literature produced there is a continuation of the traditions, tendencies, and views which were current and prevalent in Eastern Europe. Many of the writers came from those lands, and the spirit with which they were saturated in their youth permeates their creations on the soil of the Holy Land, for the life reflected in the belles-lettres is to a very large extent that of the Diaspora of the recent past. I said to a large extent, and not entirely, for there is also some reflection of the new Palestinian life which is in the process of becoming, but as yet in an imperfect state. Still, in spite of this nature, these literary productions do contain an original flavor and an indefinable spirit of a new life hitherto unknown in Hebrew letters. As a result, this center exercises a kind of hegemony and its influence on the spiritual and intellectual activity in other lands is considerable.

The shifting of the centers of Jewish population and the changes in the life of the various groups led also to an increase of literary activity in other lands, especially in the United States. Conditions were not favorable for a literary activity on a large scale; yet there was noted an increased productivity and an improvement in quality during the period in the three languages, English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and though the old traditions were continued, there is enough local color to warrant the labelling of these productions as American-Jewish literature. Other lands of the Diaspora also contributed their currents to this stream, the meandering and deviations of which we will attempt to describe.

CHAPTER II

THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVEL

6. *INTRODUCTORY*

As indicated above (Sec. 4), the Hebrew literature of the period is of a complex and heterogenous character and presents a motley of tendencies and currents, and the works of fiction are no exception. In fact, it is in this form of literature that diversity is most exemplified, for here we are dealing with creative art as a form of expression of the human spirit in which there is ample room for variety and deviation, for nuances and color according to the individual inclination and personality of the author. It is, therefore, very difficult for the historian of literature or the critic to classify the various productions according to patterns and schools and to label the writers as followers of this or that tendency, although such classification is often carried out in general literatures which develop and grow under normal conditions. This type of literary production, which is quantitatively large and exceeds that of the Haskalah period many times, grew up under exceptional and even abnormal conditions. It had no definite circle of readers whose tastes and desires had to be catered to, no literary tradition, for it is a departure from the Haskalah fiction, no canons of criticism, for real criticism had not yet been developed and in general no set of principles or aims which might guide the writers or which they might strive to realize in their stories or novels. It was a type of belles-lettres created in a rarefied air and surcharged with different tendencies but without roots in a solidified natural life. It was additionally complicated by the fact that every intellectual Jew is subject to the influence of two cultures, for he is usually master of several languages. The creators of the fiction of the period were, on the whole, under the influence of the Russian and the German literatures and all the tendencies reflected in the two were also mirrored in the Hebrew fiction. The result of this set of factors was latitude for the individual author to follow any of several literary tendencies according to the bent of his

mind and soul and often even two opposite tendencies according to his age or the change in his spiritual and mental aptitudes. All this proves that the fixing of general features of the fiction of the period is an extremely difficult task.

Still, upon close observation, we may discern at least three distinct characteristics of the fiction of the period. These are: emphasis upon the life of the individual or the projection of personality; the predominance of the short story; and the absence of the didactic and polemic elements. It is these properties which mark the dividing line between the fiction of this period and that of the preceding one. In the stories written during this span of time the individual comes into his own. The heroes are persons with distinct personalities and not types. An attempt is made either to picture the life of one or more persons in all phases as in the novel or certain episodes in that life or lives as in the short story or sketch. It is true that not all writers succeeded in the portrayal of that life nor did they create outstanding works, but the attempt and emphasis were there. This devotion to and concentration upon the individual was indirectly the cause of the predominance of the short story. Unlike the Haskalah writers who dealt more in types and who concerned themselves primarily with proving the desirability of introducing secular knowledge in Jewish life by pointing out the defects of ghetto life, and paid little regard to the construction of their novels, the later writers sought to be artistic and to display their psychological insight into the human soul. They, therefore, preferred the short story where the canvas is smaller and more suitable for the display of their talents. Only few attempted to write novels, and still fewer succeeded in the attempt.

Likewise, the desire to present as accurately as possible the state of mind of a certain person or to portray an episode in his or her life, and to execute the work according to an artistic pattern, stimulated objectivity and removed the tendency to teach the reader a moral lesson. Nor were these writers—with several notable exceptions—prone to polemicize against the defects in Jewish life. Besides, many of these defects, pictured in such lurid colors in the novel of the Haskalah, had been, as stated, removed by life itself.

However, it must not be assumed that there was complete satisfaction with Jewish life and with the complex heritage of the ages in the ranks of the writers of fiction. On the contrary, there was a marked spirit of rebellion abroad which went much deeper than that of the writers

of the Haskalah. There was a tendency, expressed by some, to change the entire aspect of that life and to rebuild it entirely on different foundations. There was much impatience, not only with Rabbinic rigor, but with the entire law and its resultant form of life and ideals. In other words, we have a recurrence of the struggle between Law and life (Vol. III, Sec. 46), but in an entirely different manner than before. The writers of the Haskalah had a more definite conception of their demands as well as of the class of persons who obstructed the realization of their aims. They carried on, therefore, a definite polemic in their belles-lettres against specific manifestations in Jewish life and against that class. This polemic often vitiated the artistic quality of their works, but it brought them closer to reality. The rebellious writers of the later period, on the other hand, had no clear conception of their aims, but were merely impatient of the burden of the ancient heritage of laws and views and strove for an indefinable liberty. There was no specific polemic but merely a cry of protest uttered by many of the "heroes" of the stories against a certain order of life. It was not a question of observance of laws or conformity to a certain pattern, as in the productions of the Haskalah, against which the protest was uttered, for these "heroes" had emancipated themselves from such bondage long ago. It was primarily directed against the traits of character, the effects of an age-long culture and tradition upon the members of a group, passed on from father to son, and from which it is so difficult for the rebellious individuals to emancipate themselves. I have dwelt somewhat at length upon this rebellion reflected in a part of the belles-lettres, for it will help us to understand much of the fiction usually designated as realistic as well as to appreciate the extent of the change which took place in the life of the younger generation of Jews during this span of time.

This particular phenomenon was an outgrowth of the centrifugal tendency which, though influenced by the national idea, carried with it nonetheless a desire to secularize Jewish life completely and base it on general human values. Simultaneously, however, the centripetal tendency, described above, resulted in a current in fiction which idealized the standard type of Jewish life and showed its beauty and value by the portrayal of episodes which enhanced these qualities. We have then three currents in the Hebrew fiction of the period, the idealistic, the realistic, and the psychological. The aims of the first were those mentioned above; those of the second were primarily to picture Jewish

life as it is in reality with its lights and shadows. However, since that life in its external aspect had, on account of oppression and of poverty, more shadow than light, the former had a greater share in the literary productions. Moreover, the writers of the realistic school were closer to the life of the younger generation which was far from uniform, and which was torn by struggle and was under stress of conflicting emotions. It followed that the type reflected in their writings was one of conflict, contradiction, rebellion, and of suffering.

The third tendency is distinguished by its objective and artistic character. It aims to portray, as said, episodes in the life of the individual with an insight into the motives and makeup of the soul of the subject of the story. It is a current of art for art's sake, and although the followers of this cult were, on the whole, few, yet they left an impression and a fair amount of productions. The first two currents are not homogenous but display two main variations, one in which the tendency—either idealistic or realistic—is realized by the portrayal of the life of the individual, and the other by picturing that of the group. The second division practically forms, on account of the quantity of productions in which this characteristic predominates, a fourth current which may be called the folkloristic.

All these designations are merely meant to indicate the general aims, methods, and direction of the fiction of the time in a very wide connotation. In reality, the lines are not drawn fast. There are many writers who partake of two or more tendencies, and likewise, there is much display of psychological insight among the realists or even among the idealists. It is merely a matter of emphasis and stress on certain characteristics on the part of the writer which inclines us to classify him as a follower of one type of literary production or another. The important thing is that the Hebrew fiction of the period is many-sided and reflects the various phases of Jewish life. What proportion the types bear to one another, and whether a writer produced only one type of stories or several are irrelevant questions.

7. DAVID FRISHMAN

The first who sounded the new note in modern Hebrew fiction, a note of beauty combined with psychological emphasis and analysis of the mental and emotional state of the subjects of his short stories was David Frishman (1860-1922). Frishman constitutes a veritable landmark in modern Hebrew literature, and much of its improvement

and development along aesthetic lines can be credited to his influence. His literary activity was versatile and all-embracing for he distinguished himself as poet, critic, feuilletonist, editor, translator, and short story writer. He belonged to the chosen few who, like the hero in the comedy of Terence, could say with deep sincerity, *Humanus sum et nihil humani alienum a me puto* (I am a man and nothing human is strange to me). Every angle of human life and its revelation in literature was of interest to him, and to each of the various branches he contributed a valuable part which is distinguished by a quality entirely his own. His was a soul with a catholicity which vibrated to every pulsation of life and art, and especially to the latter, for art, namely a sense of beauty and proportion, was the very essence of his being. It is this particular characteristic which served as the harmonizing factor of his otherwise diversified character. He was endowed simultaneously with a deep poetic feeling, a romantic inclination, a delicate humor, a penetrating satire, and a critical power of observation. But all these qualities were tempered by a fine sense of proportion so that none of these attributes was ever unduly exaggerated. His humor was light and his satire seldom malicious, though at times painful. It is his diversity and the essential unity of his outlook which primarily contributed to his great influence on the entire Hebrew literature during the larger part of the period under discussion. In general, the appearance of Frishman on the threshold of a new period in Jewish life and literature, at a time when the atmosphere was still saturated with the ideals of the Haskalah, and when the battle-cry of its champions was still resounding, was a phenomenon of unusual importance. He was the precursor of a new type of fiction wherein the individual holds the central point and the writer plays the role of an observer rather than participant in, and champion of, movements; a type of fiction in which the inner life of men and women is of more importance than their external relations with their environment. The newness of this trend captivated the imagination and was emulated by many.

The character of Frishman's literary activity is partly explained by his life and education. He was one of the few writers of the period, and probably the only one, who did not enter literature by way of the *Yeshibah* nor did he go through the struggle for enlightenment as many of his contemporaries. His parents were both well-to-do and enlightened, and he was raised in the large industrial city of Lodz, where the Jews, especially those of the mercantile class to which his

family belonged, were already emancipated from the narrow confines of the ghetto. David even had a governess who taught him several European languages, and he was especially proficient in German, the vernacular in Lodz, the literature of which he studied assiduously from early youth. His Hebrew education, however, was not neglected. Like all Jewish children he attended the *Heder* and studied the Bible and some Talmud under a private teacher. His love for Hebrew was great, and being of a poetic nature, he was attracted by the Bible and absorbed the spirit of its language in a remarkable degree, a fact which affected his style as shown by his unusual mastery of Biblical diction and his exceptional ability for adapting it to the expression of all nuances of modern life. He was a voracious reader of the literatures of several European languages, especially of the German, and of classic poetry the writers of which exerted a dominant influence upon him. He thus came to Hebrew literature fully equipped for the role of apostle of Europeanism and good taste. It seems that writing was his natural propensity for he began his literary career very early publishing his first story in Smolenskin's monthly, *ha-Shahar*, at the age of eighteen. According to his own testimony, however, he wrote it at the age of thirteen, and from that time on, for forty-four years, literature was his profession. The versatility and fertility of Frishman made him an asset to publishers and editors and he was much sought after. He collaborated with Nahum Sokolow in the editing of the Annual, *ha-Asif* (The Gatherer, Sec. 54), and then accepted the post of assistant editor of the *ha-Yom* (The Day), the first Hebrew daily which Dr. Kantor began to publish in 1884. At the cessation of the publication of that Daily in 1888, he left for Germany and studied for several years at the Breslau University, but did not take a degree there. In the early nineties he returned to Warsaw, the center of Hebrew literature at the time, and engaged there for several decades in the writing of short stories, poems, and essays, but above all in translations. He enriched Hebrew literature with numerous translations from the German, French, and English of the works of Goethe, Heine, Spilhagen, Anatole France, Byron, Shakespeare, Nietzsche, and Rabindranath Tagore, besides several scientific works and a history of culture. During the World War he lived successively in Odessa and Moscow, and finally settled in Berlin where he died in the summer of 1922.

The diversified literary activity of David Frishman cannot be described in a few pages, and we will have to deal with him again and

again. For the present, however, we are interested in him as a short story writer. It is in this field that he made his chief contribution to Hebrew belles-lettres. The most essential characteristics of his stories are their brevity, both external and internal, and their psychological intensity. As far as their external phase is concerned, they are sketches more than stories, the longest of them consisting of only thirty-five small pages. Nor are they really stories in the sense that they describe or reveal the life of one or more persons in its entirety or even a fair section of it, but are primarily sketches of one episode, or still better, of certain moments in that life. These moments, though, are of great importance and frequently decide the fate of the heroes or heroines for the rest of their natural lives. Frishman describes and analyzes them with such intensity that in spite of brevity they become luminous points which shed light even on the darkest recesses of the soul of the heroes. Our writer who was withal a man of the world, gay and debonair, and who continually worshipped at the temple of beauty, had a special predilection for the tragic, the exotic in life, in which the struggle between passion and desire, on the one hand, and tradition, piety, and habit, on the other hand, is intensified to the nth degree. He did not have to look far for the subjects of his stories. His heroes are not grand personages, but ordinary men and women of the ghetto, whose lives were otherwise little distinguished from their drab environment, who, because of the tragedy and struggle within their souls, possess an element of grandeur.

In his sketches which make up several volumes of his collected writings, there are generally to be distinguished two groups. The first has as its motive tragedies of parents in the ghetto resulting from the apostasy of their children who were lured and drawn by the glamor of the great world like moths to the fire, and who attempted to drown the longing in their hearts in the noise and turmoil of pleasure and honor the strange world could offer. To this group belong the stories: *be-Yom ha-Kippurim* (The Day of Atonement); *Haskorat Neshomot* (Memorial Service); and *Tikkun Shel Shebuot* (The Shebuot Night Recitation). The motive in all three is, with slight variations, essentially the same, but the description, which differs in each, lends a peculiar charm to the stories and supplies them with individuality. The plot of the first centers around a tragic episode in the life of a widow named Sarah who killed her apostate daughter, a famous singer, when she appeared in her native town, Gradow, at a concert on the Eve of

the Day of Atonement, whither she came after acquiring fame and recognition. As a result the mother became insane, and after her acquittal by the court, wandered around in the streets of the small town aimlessly. The starting point in the story is a short description of the town which is divided by the river Wartha into two parts, the old and new Gradow. The old Gradow was a typical ghetto town where Jewish life flowed quietly in its narrow channels. In the new section, the residence of the Polish nobles, life had a quicker tempo; pleasure, love, and song were not unknown there. This town serves as a symbol of the two worlds, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, contiguous to each other and yet separated from one another, and when one crossed the line, he seldom returned. And what happened to many of the children of the ghetto, happened also to Esther, daughter of Sarah the widow, who crossed the bridge into the new town one day to sell her mother's wares at the inn of Moses, where Polish nobles gathered to drink. There a new world opened up before her—a world of song; and she who had music in her soul was slowly drawn to the new life until one day she disappeared from her mother's home never to return. In vain did her mother search for her. The convent led to the school of music, from there to the stage where the virtuoso charmed her Polish admirers with her voice and beauty. And all this time the widow's daughter drowned the tragedy of her soul in a whirl of gayety, love, and the flattery of admirers, while her mother in the ghetto of Gradow mourned her lost daughter. Then the fatal moment arrived; mother met daughter once more, and the struggle between mother love and outraged piety—desecration of the holiest day of the year—and above all rage at her daughter's joining the camp of the Polish nobles, one of whom had killed her husband, the father of Esther, began. One moment rage triumphed, and the next maternal love; and Sarah went insane. These few incidents which led to the great tragedy in the lives of mother and daughter are masterfully interwoven in an indirect way and the details are given in a casual manner. Frishman begins with a description of his heroine when she is already insane and from that point works his way back to the moment of the tragedy. The story contains a strong subjective element. The author seems to participate in the narrative, and the incident assumes a form of reminiscence enveloped in a halo of legend and poetry. This is one of Frishman's characteristic devices for imparting a poetic tinge to his short stories.

The second story has a similar theme. Another Jewish daughter

forsakes her people and her parent, this time a widowed father, and escapes into the world by marrying a count, the owner of the city of her birth, who was a frequent visitor in her father's home when in need of a loan. This Jewish daughter is lured not by the beauty of song but by the glamor of the great world. The father, though a money lender, loves his daughter more than all his gold, and yet when she comes to ask forgiveness, he drives her out,—religion and piety triumph in the struggle—yet he mourns for her and recites the *Yiskor* (the memorial prayer for the dead), though she is alive. And yet again, after some time when she returns from distant lands to the palace of the count in her native city, his fatherly love has the mastery and he goes to see his blue-eyed daughter once more; but this time she drives him out. The strain of the struggle proves too severe for the stern but loving father and in a few days he dies. There is less pathos in this story than in the first, but more poetic description. Frishman's technique is improved, and the whole episode is given a legendary form; the details are told by the whispering of the gnarled and ancient trees of the park of the palace whither the blue-eyed Jewess followed her lover. There is also a fine analysis of the thoughts of the father while reciting for a living daughter prayers for the dead.

The third story can really be called so by courtesy, for it is merely a presentation of the thoughts of a father on the vicissitudes that befell his children when they left him to go into the strange world, and though they did not completely merge with it, yet they became estranged from their own little world. The most exquisite thing about the sketch is the form in which it is expressed. The details are framed in a number of Biblical verses which the father recites on the first night of Shebuot the contents of which correspond to the events and evoke memories. The portion which the orthodox Jew reads on that night is an abridgement of the entire Pentateuch containing excerpts from each section. The father reads, "And we said to our master, we have an old father and a young child born to him in his old age, and his brother died and he alone was left to his father and mother, and his father loved him." (Genesis XLIV, 20.). And the father is reminded of his youngest son, who, like his older brothers, left his home and his teachings and went to follow strange gods and new ideals. Ah, his *Ben Zekunim* (youngest child)! "And his father loved him." Great was also his love, but he left him. He reads on, "Every one of you shall revere his father and mother, and ye shall observe the Sabbath." (Le-

viticus XIX, 3). The words recall sad memories. The older sons were irreverent, left his house and went into the large city, and there they desecrated the Sabbath—and the youngest, he also went, never to return. Rarer and rarer have his letters become. And then revolt breaks out in Poland. The youngest, a Polish patriot, joins the rebels, and one day the father witnesses the hanging of the rebels—and the last to ascend the gallows is his own son. He and his wife fall to the ground; he rises, but she does not. And the old man reads on, “And Ruth said, ‘Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge—only death shall part us.’” (Ruth I, 16, 17.) He also had a daughter, reared in the sanctity of his home but not protected from the arrows of love, and that lover was a Gentile. She did not cross the line, but even death did not part them, for both were found drowned. Dawn breaks, the ghetto puts on an air of festivity, and slowly the tears dry, the furrows of the brow straighten out, sorrow is banished from the face of the lone man; it is the day of the Lord, sorrow is forbidden. Such episodes took place in the life of the Jew of the near past, when the two worlds met and the crossings from one to the other were made by daring spirits, attended by suffering and tragedy.

The second group contains sketches which have as their theme struggles with either great all-embracing passions or the pathos of desires unfulfilled. Of such nature are *Ish u-Miktarto* (A Man and His Pipe); *Kupat Rabbi Meir Ba'al ha-Nes* (The Box of Rabbi Meir the Wonder Worker); *Mizwah* (The Precept); *Tithadesh* (Wear It Well); *le-Ereẓ Yisrael* (To the Land of Israel), and many others. The subject of the first is a Rabbi whose fame for piety and learning spread far and wide. He was addicted to smoking, and one Sabbath day, overcome by this passion, he smoked his pipe. He repented, cried and fasted, and for a time succeeded in repressing his passion for smoking. But he slipped once more and this time succumbed completely. Henceforth he was ostracized from the community. That moment was the decisive one in his life changing his whole conduct. He became a heretic (*Apikoros*), sent his son to the gymnasium, and thus severed himself from the ghetto and its life. The psychological moment of the struggle is well portrayed.

The second story is still more artistic, for while the first deals with a passion for pleasure, this sketch portrays a fierce struggle between piety and hunger. A poor widow, whose source of income is slowly reduced to almost nothing, suffers for days the pangs of hunger. It

occurs to her to break open the charity box devoted to Rabbi Meir the Wonder Worker (the money was collected for the poor of Palestine), and steal a few pennies in order to satisfy her hunger. After a fierce struggle, the act is committed, the bread is bought; but then the struggle begins anew, and she faints without tasting the coveted bread.

The theme of the third story is the law which bids a husband divorce his wife who does not bear him any children within ten years of their marriage. In this story, as told to the author by the father of the husband, a pious Polish Jew, the couple loved each other dearly and the separation was forced upon the young man by his father and his environment. The struggle between love and the law is not portrayed here, for Frishman concentrates upon the father rather than on the son. He keeps on muttering, "It was a *Mizwah*," and does not feel or refuses to feel the tragedy involved by the application of the inexorable law. Gordon would have made the incident a subject of a tirade against the hard-hearted Rabbis, but Frishman knows better. He merely asks, "What is a *Mizwah* to a Jew for the sake of which he sacrifices his happiness?" Is the sacrifice a result of great strength of spirit or merely superstitious fear? Is it sublime self-mastery or slavish obedience?" He leaves these questions unanswered.

Very pathetic is the short sketch *Tithadesh* (the benediction bestowed upon one who puts on a new garment, literally, may you have many new things), which pictures the passionate desire of a poor tailor's son for a new suit of clothes for he has always worn cast-off garments. His jealousy of the other children, who have new suits for the holidays and whose friends greet them with the customary benediction, is deep and fills his heart. Year after year he waits for the fulfillment of his desire, but it never comes. Once when apprenticed to a tailor, he tries on a new suit of clothes which he was told to deliver to a customer. He longs to taste that pleasure for at least a few moments, but he is caught in the act and is ignominiously dismissed. Poverty has its sway and the youngster becomes tubercular and dies. He is wrapped in a new shroud but he never hears the magic word *Tithadesh*.

Le-Erez Yisrael (On to Palestine) has the same motive, an unfulfilled desire as its theme, but is less pathetic. It is an idyllic picture of the happy life of a couple who loved each other simply but deeply, and whose earnest desire from the time they were married was to settle in Palestine. It was an *idée fixe* with them and they spoke of it every day of their lives, but kept on delaying it. They did not possess that

all-consuming passion of the poor tailor boy nor was the delay as excruciating, but pathos is there. They did finally journey together, but to their eternal rest. The beauty of the sketch, however, lies more in the poetic description of the idyll rather than in the theme.

To the same cycle belongs also his fine fantastic story of *ha-Golem* (Homunculus), which is based upon the legend of the creation of a *Golem* by Rabbi Judah Löw of Prague by means of the Ineffable Name. Frishman utilizes the legend for his purposes; he places in opposition to the aged Rabbi, an ascetic, in search of the secrets of the world, his granddaughter Hava who is filled with desire for the lifeless *Golem* lying behind the stove. The Ineffable Name which, when placed under his tongue, gives him life, was taken away by the Rabbi. The white and beautiful figure kindles in her a strange passion and she kneels and kisses him, pressing him to her throbbing body. Strangely, her passion and warmth wake the *Golem* into life. Henceforth he is torn between two influences, that of the Rabbi who instills in him a desire for holiness and of Hava who constantly seduces him to a love of the pleasures of life. This dualism drives him to suicide and on *Rosh ha-Shanah* at the ceremony of *Tashlik* he throws himself into the river. He is drawn out, and partly through the influence of the holy Rabbi and partly through the seductive influence of Hava, is brought to life again. "And," adds the author cynically, "when I was in Prague, I saw him still alive." "But," he says further, "I saw him also in other cities." This fine allegory of the constant struggle in the heart of many between the striving for a higher life and the life of pleasure has a ring of universality.

In all these sketches and stories there is still the echo of the Haskalah, the conflict between the narrow life of the ghetto hemmed in by the law and the wider life towards which the individual strives, a life of enjoyment and pleasure. It is an old struggle in Jewry dating from the time of the Hellenists. It reappeared in this period, not in the narrow form of the Haskalah period in which enlightenment was the coveted aim, but in a new form, a desire for life in its physical aspect. The Haskalah period passed but its shadow lingered, for as long as Jewish life remained intact in its integrity and the ghetto was still in existence, even if its gates were no more barred, clashes between the traditional world view and the general were bound to arise and tragedies were bound to occur.

Frishman was no fighter but he considered himself an apostle of

beauty, of art, and of a freer life among the Jews, and he spread this gospel in his own way. He was a man of the world and he felt the weight of the law and the severity of restraint it imposes, and he tried to relieve it, though not through storm as others did, but in moderation, by picturing both sides and leaving the reader to judge for himself. It is this secret rebellion against law and restraint which underlies his artistic series of Biblical stories called *ba-Midbar* (In the Desert). The period, when the Law was given to the Jews, when their life was as unruly as that of the wild ass and as free as the desert wind, was chosen by him as the vehicle for his portrayal of the clash between law and life. This idea is especially projected in the stories *ha-Mekoshesh* (The Wood Gatherer) and *be-Har Sinai* (At Mount Sinai). The first relates the story told in Numbers XV, 32-35, that Moses ordered the stoning of an Israelite who was found gathering wood on the Sabbath. He describes him as a man ignorant of the law, for the Sabbath was still new and unknown, who was gathering the wood in order to heat some water for his sick wife. The helplessness and misery of the man and the apparent heartlessness of the priests, whom Frishman portrays in Voltairian style as waxing fat on the religion they teach, are drawn in sharp contrast and in projecting relief. The reader obtains the impression that the death of the wood-gatherer was not only useless but unjust. To heighten the tragedy he adds another episode. The little daughter of the wood-gatherer who arrived on the scene after the execution sees the heap of stones, and not understanding its import, plays with the pebbles strewn around the grave and throws them also on the heap. More artistic is the story *be-Har Sinai* which portrays the wild love-life of a boy and girl, Mushi and Pua, who followed the Jewish camp. They have no one in the world but each other, and their life is one round of joy. Suddenly, they hear thunder and see lightning—the Torah is being revealed. They do not understand its meaning but are disturbed nevertheless, and one fine morning Pua disappears from the side of Mushi. He finds her later following the camp of Moses. He too follows the Israelitish camp—but his love for Pua has cooled and joy is gone forever. Law and restraint have come into the world. There are also other motives as typified by *Meholot* (Dances) and *'Ir Miklot* (City of Refuge). The first tells of the intense love of Put and Timnah which, alas, lasted only for a short time. Put leaves Timnah, giving her a ring before his departure for Egypt. That ring contains the essence of life for Timnah as well as hope for the return of

her lover. One day religious fervor sweeps the camp; a golden calf is being created. A wagon drawn by oxen passes before the tents and golden ornaments are thrown into it; a feverish emotion seizes all. The wagon stops at the tent of Timnah; she has nothing but the ring. Higher and higher rise the passions of the people. Ornament after ornament is thrown into the wagon—unconsciously the ring slips from her finger and with it her joy in life departs. On the morrow a festival is declared and the people dance around the golden calf. One dancer appears who performs marvelously. Round and round she spins; the applause increases; the dancer grows wilder and wilder and foam appears on her lips and she falls dead. It was Timnah who danced the dance of her life—love and death.

The second pictures the life of a harlot in the camp of Israel. These were the days of freedom and passion, for people were not yet subdued by law. One day this carefree harlot peers into the sanctuary and there she sees a young and handsome priest and he sees her. A change comes over both. She is touched by his air of sanctity and innocence, he by her physical beauty. He renounces his priesthood and follows her, but in vain. She does not show him favor because she loves him. She does not want to contaminate him with her unclean body and so she suppresses her passion. He commits suicide and she flees to the city of refuge as the first unintentional murderess.

The charm of these stories consist to a great extent in their style which is in such remarkable harmony with the period that they appear like pages torn out of an Apocryphal Pentateuch.

Frishman also wrote a number of satirical stories wherein he satirized certain phases of Jewish life and portrayed their grotesqueness, including the ludicrous side of the Haskalah. These are however much inferior to the stories described and more closely resemble the feuilleton. There are in Frishman's short stories temporal and ephemeral elements and some of them are of little interest to us today. But there is also much of the permanent and universal and many of his stories still strike a chord in our hearts. In his time he was a pathfinder, for though he borrowed from others many a theme for his stories, he told them in his original Frishmanic way and in masterly Hebrew style.

8. MORDECAI ZEEB FEIRBERG

Struggle, which is the keynote of Frishman's short stories and sketches, is also the warp and woof of another writer of the nineties

who, though his literary activity was of short duration for he died at the age of twenty-four, made, in his time, a great impression on his contemporaries. This gifted youth was Mordecai Zeeb Feirberg (1874-99). The struggle depicted by Feirberg is similar to that described by Frishman but not identical, for it differs both in intensity and quality. His short stories do not deal with momentary struggles, with great passions, or with natural feelings as those of Frishman, but with the permanent struggle of two world views going on in the soul of the young Jew of the post-Haskalah period, each of which exerts a strong pull over his personality, and he, standing on the crossroads, is perplexed not knowing whither to turn, for both possess not only the power of attraction but also of repulsion. Feirberg, in his sketches, gives voice to the tragedy of a whole generation of young people whose life in the ghetto with its narrowness and drabness was both repellent and attractive to them. They could not escape from it, for they also knew the dark spots in the alluring and apparently luminous outside world and could not by the very nature of their souls, saturated with the heritage of ages, immerse themselves in it. Apparently this struggle resembles that of the heroes of the Haskalah novel, for there is still the same conflict between the traditions and education inculcated in childhood and the knowledge and strivings of a later age, nor has the type of hero changed much externally, for he is still the student of the *Yeshibah*. Yet the resemblance is only apparent. The heroes of the Haskalah were primarily rationalists and their goal was clear to them. They strove to acquire secular knowledge and to emancipate themselves from the burden or at least from the rigors of the religion as practiced in the ghetto. On the whole, there is a ring of materialism in their struggle and achievements. The hero of Feirberg—for there is only one in his few stories—is of a different cut. His struggle is not purely intellectual, though that element is not missing, but also deeply emotional and even primarily so, nor is his goal clear to him, for he does not see salvation in the increase of secular knowledge among the Jews for that had already been, in measure, achieved, with disappointing results. He also knows the grievous faults in the general modern life. The salvation the hero is seeking is not only a renovation of his own life but of the life of the entire Jewish people. He is looking for a solution to the great enigma, the anomalous and tragic existence of the Jewish people; he is seeking an ideal which should justify the suffering undergone for the sake of Judaism and convert it into a joyful

and pleasant experience as it was to innumerable generations of Jews in the past. They had faith, but Feirberg's hero has lost his; and therein lies the tragedy. He is therefore perplexed, and the question, *Whither* (*le-On*), the title of his most important story, remains unanswered.

Much of the form and quality that Feirberg gave to the struggle of the young generation was due to the milieu and environment in which the author was born and raised. He hailed from a Ḥassidic family of Novygrad-Volhynsk, an important Jewish community in the province of Volhynia, and was the son of a *Shoḥet* who was not only excessively pious, but even fanatically so. Practically all of his life he spent in the atmosphere of the small provincial town where the ghetto was still intact and life was of the ordinary, colorless, and poverty-stricken type saturated with superstition and illuminated by the pale glow of legend and wonder stories of the Ḥassidic Rabbis. His education was that of the *Heder* and later the *Bet ha-Midrash* (The Study Hall) of the synagogue where he was instructed in Bible and Talmud. The youth, however, had a poetic soul and the difficult legal phase of the Talmud did not attract him. He therefore turned to the Agada and to the numerous half-ethical and half-narrative books of Mediaeval literature wherein he found sustenance for his emotional soul. At the age of fifteen he began to study in the *Bet ha-Midrash* together with several other youths of the same age. There he found his way to Haskalah, became acquainted with modern Hebrew literature, and even studied some German and Russian. It was then that the tragedy of his life became apparent to him and the struggle between two worlds began in his own life. Urged by his poetic spirit, he strove to escape from the drab life of the ghetto, but simultaneously he was also reluctant to forsake it for it held a peculiar charm for him. His fanatical father attempted to turn his son back from the path of heresy by various means, finally by betrothing him to the daughter of a *Shoḥet* of a near-by town in the hope that the responsibilities of married life would turn his attention to weightier matters than the reading of heretical books and the writing of stories. He did not, however, realize his father's hopes nor did he enjoy for long the love which sprang up between him and his fiancée, for soon after the betrothal, he was stricken with tuberculosis of the throat, and after several years of illness, he died in his twenty-fifth year.

His literary remains are quantitatively slight. They consist of a few sketches and one long story entitled *le-On* (*Whither*). It is this story

on which his fame rests, but the other sketches also possess literary value and poetic charm which indicate the incipient development of a great talent. There is little action in the story and sketches as they are mostly autobiographical.

The volume of his collected works opens with a little sketch, *be-Ereb* (In the Evening), symbolic of the struggle in the soul of the young modern Jew. It is a charming picture of a day and an evening in the life of a Jewish child in a Volhynian town in the nineties of the last century. To many of the readers who in their youth visited the *Heder*, it recalls pleasant memories long forgotten. To those who never experienced that exotic life, it reveals a quaint corner in the life of childhood. Hophni, the name Feirberg chose for himself, tells of his visit in the *Heder*. Attendance in the evening was considered a sign of promotion to a higher class where the study of the *Humesh* (Pentateuch) was pursued. In simple but impressive colors he portrays a scene at twilight when the boys, left to themselves by the teacher who has gone to the synagogue, huddle together in the gathering darkness and tell stories. This is followed by a description of the evening's study and the homecoming of the young student. All this proves to be merely a setting for a folk story as told to Hophni by his mother, which is symbolic of the entire history of Israel.

Once there was a poor Jew by the name of Joseph who ran the inn on the estate of a Polish noble. The nobleman was kind to the Jew, but in the manner of the day, often had his fun with him, forcing him to sing synagogue melodies and dance before him. As a reward he overlooked the payment of rent. The Jew was satisfied with his lot except for his longing for a son. When Rabbi Leib Sore's—a wonder worker famed in Hassidic lore—stopped at the inn, Joseph presented his plea and was promised a son, but was warned that the son would possess a great soul which the *Kelipah* (Evil Power) would endeavor to ensnare, and that a struggle would ensue between the powers of holiness and the powers of evil for its possession. In due time the son came, and the *Besht* (Vol. III, Sec. 6) sent Rabbi Leib with a few trusted followers to guard the infant. The noble asked Joseph for the infant whom he wanted to adopt but was scornfully refused in spite of the threat of imprisonment. The eve before circumcision, the nobleman, who was a wizard, made great efforts to obtain the infant, but Rabbi Leib and his trustees kept watch. Every device was used by the wizard; he sent his servants to knock at the door in his name and in the

name of customers, but in vain; the door did not open. Finally, a voice was heard saying, "In the name of the *Besht* open the door," and one of the guardians replied, "I am ready." At that moment a black cat rushed into the house and snatched the child from its crib. The Prince of Evil (Samael) had triumphed.

The nobleman punished the rebellious Joseph, lashing him to death; the family left the estate, and the child remained with the nobleman. He was a remarkable child; he was taught the sciences and also music which he loved greatly. At the age of twelve, however, his Jewish consciousness began to stir within him when he was called *Zhid* (an opprobrious name for Jew) by his playmates. It disturbed him, and on the eve of his thirteenth birthday, he dreamt a dream. He saw an old man, his face smeared with blood, who informed him that he is a Jew and that he must leave the palace and follow him. In some mysterious manner, the boy came to the Rabbi of the nearest town who instructed him in the Talmud and he became a great scholar. He was then sent to the famous school at Amsterdam. The Rabbi, who knew of the impending danger, supplied him with a talisman and staff and instructed him to draw a circle around him with that staff. On his way to Amsterdam, the youth fell asleep in a forest after drawing around him the magic circle. In the night things began to happen. Wolves rushed towards him with open mouths; other animals followed, but all stopped at the magic circle. Suddenly a wonderful melody was heard and the sweet tones penetrated the heart of the youth. He struggled and longed to see the players, but was held by the talisman. Slowly, however, the talisman slipped, and he, captivated by the melody, was seized by the wind and carried back to the palace of the nobleman. At the door, though, he was grasped by a powerful hand, the hand of his father, and he heard a voice, "Do not follow the melody; it is false and strange. Go back to the Torah; here is the lost talisman. Go back! back!"

The story ceases abruptly and Hophni goes to sleep, but its symbolism is not lost. It is the eternal struggle of the Jew who sways between his Torah which calls for particularism, and the lure, the melody of another greater and wider world. To Hophni, however, it symbolizes constant warfare in his own life; struggle with powers of evil, with sin, with unseen enemies in a mysterious world. The same idea of the struggle Judaism must wage for its integrity is also carried out in the

sketch, *The Talisman*, where Hophni is taken to a Kabbalist to obtain a talisman as protection against the forces of evil. There he overhears the conversation between his father and the Kabbalist who complain of the trend of the times. All has changed; pious men have become rare; youths leave the *Yeshibah* and go to secular schools, and the ranks of "the soldiers of the Lord" become thinned. He feels that he is part of this great struggle and is a consecrated soldier, but for what cause and against whom he does not know.

This problem is presented fully in *le-On*. The hero, called Nahman the Demented, is presented to us in the crucial moment of his life when he, the famed young Talmudic scholar, the son of a Rabbi, publicly commits an act of impiety by extinguishing the wax candle in the synagogue on the Eve of the Day of Atonement. He is declared demented, and henceforth lives secluded from the rest of the people, sunk in his own thoughts. This act is a form of protest against all that he considers antiquated in Judaism, against a life fettered by tradition and prohibitions and represents a culmination of the rebellion which had been brewing in his heart for years. He does not, however, leave the ghetto after this, for he does not know whither to go. Slowly the story of his life is unrolled before us. We see Nahman at the age of nine. As all children he longs to play, but is often rudely torn away from the games by his father who warns him against the *Yezzer ha-Ra* which lurks for the soul of men. The boy is torn between two emotions, the lure of the street and the war with the *Yezzer ha-Ra*. He reads pietistic books wherein Hell is pictured and punishment described, and terror seizes him and rebellion springs up in his heart against a God of vengeance. He bends under the yoke of piety. Another episode: He sees his father performing *Hazot* (the midnight service of mourning at the fall of Jerusalem) and is greatly impressed. Permeated by emotion he is mastered by a desire to bring about the coming of the Messiah. There surely is a way, he reflects, and the holy books must contain the secret. He searches and years pass in the search, but Messiah does not come.

The child turns into a youth and new thoughts come to his mind; life calls; nature attracts; but he still comes daily to the dusty study-hall; and then the struggle begins anew. He hears his father say Jews are the soldiers of God, and he, the scholar, must dedicate himself to His service. But, asks Nahman, must all men be soldiers? Is there

not an easier and simpler way in life? Daily he goes to the *Bet ha-Midrash* which is empty and dark, while in the fields and gardens life is bright and beautiful.

Years pass and he becomes interested in philosophy and he reads the works of Mediaeval Jewish philosophers; and one fine morning he loses his God and ceases to pray. He does not, like the *Maskilim* of old, exult in his new knowledge, but mourns his loss. He would like to regain his trust in the Almighty, the Merciful, the God of Moses and the prophets. However, with the loss of faith he does not lose his love for his people. He wants to cure its ills, change its life to a free and natural one. He starts out to do great things, but does not know how. He marries and his struggle is intensified, for his young wife engages instructors who teach him languages and the gates of world literature are opened to him, and new desires seize him. Yes, he muses, he will be the soldier of his people, not to guard the old, but to lead it into a new life in which it will take its place in the march of humanity towards progress. But these are only dreams, and he expresses his desire to break with the old form of life in that final act, for he knows no other way of action. He keeps on dreaming, not of religious reforms but of a national renaissance, but he keeps his thoughts to himself. Only once more does his enthusiasm break forth and that is when the "Lovers of Zion" make their appearance in the town. Nahman comes uninvited and speaks of the past of the Jewish people, of their prophets, of their idealism and message to humanity, and outlines a program for the future. Not only does he want the possession of a territory by the Jews but also that they carry the torch of great ideals to the entire East.—This is the last flicker of Nahman.

In this speech of Nahman, there is the message of Feirberg to the youth not to leave the Jewish world and not to narrow it to the four ells of religion, but to raise Judaism to a spiritual world power. How and in what way? That even Feirberg did not know.

The emotional hold which the old type of Jewish life had upon the intellectually emancipated youth is strongly reflected in the sketch, *ha-Zellolim* (The Shadows). It is a fantasy wherein the author presents the innermost thoughts which pass through his mind while sitting alone at night in the shadows of the study-hall. A struggle goes on in his heart; a voice calls to him, "Hophni, what are you doing in a world of shadows which belongs to the past? Look, yonder is a world full

of light and throbbing life." "Nay," says Hophni to himself, "I love the shadows, there is a tragic charm in them. They are not mere shadows, for among them flutter the spirits of saints, of martyrs, and the souls of men great in moral power and religious fervor." Another voice is heard, "No, Hophni, you cannot leave the shadows; you are to suffer in this world as all the other souls of the past, and not only to suffer but also to hope for another day when the sun of righteousness will break forth over the entire world. Only then," concludes the youthful author, "will I forsake the shadows. But now, whither shall I flee? Shall I go to the mighty who do not understand the soul of the unfortunate? Nay, I do not want to be oppressed, but still more do I not want to be an oppressor." There is much pathos in these words, but even more than that. The thoughts are pregnant with symbolic meaning of the struggle of the Jew in this world and his hopes for a better and brighter future for humanity in general. This universalistic and humanistic note played an important part in the author's aspirations and strivings. His love for his people and his decision to stay in its narrow world was not due merely to emotional attraction but also to the conviction that Judaism contains a great moral power which will ultimately manifest itself as an active factor in the progress of humanity.

The spirit of kindness of the poetic youth which embraces in totality not only humanity but all living beings permeates one of his best sketches called *ha-Agel* (The Calf). It pictures the feelings of a child of nine when he witnesses the destruction of life for the first time. A calf was born to their cow and it was exceptionally pretty. The child caressed it, played with it, and was overjoyed at its arrival. But then he overhears his mother's conversation with the *Shohet* about the time when it is to be slaughtered. The boy is terrified and rebellion springs up in his heart. Why, he asks, was it born? Why was it created and why is it so beautiful if its end is so near? He protests to his mother, he pleads with her, but in vain—she only laughs at him. And the heart of the child palpitates and his mind is confused. This episode is pictured with a masterful hand and with great artistry.

To many of the readers of the day who hardly know the world of Feirberg, his struggles and their pathos may be of little interest, but in his time and in his generation, they were full of meaning and hence his great influence. However, if we penetrate deeper into his words and thoughts, we can discover in them a prognostication of the more

permanent problem of the Jew who, though sharing in equal measure the burdens and hazards of human progress, wants to retain his spiritual integrity against an opposing world.

9. *JUDAH STEINBERG*

Allied to the two preceding writers in his general literary tendency, though vastly different from them in method, world view, and in the content of his stories is the prolific short story writer and novelist, Judah Steinberg (1863-1908). He may also be said to belong to the idealistic-romantic school to which Frishman and Feirberg belonged, which often portrayed the finer side of Jewish ghetto life by selecting types of the older generation whose lives possessed depth as well as certain peculiar phases of great interest to the psychologist and the observer of the mysteries of life. But whereas Frishman only touches upon a few limited aspects of that life, especially on that of the struggle and clash ensuing from the meeting of two worlds, and Feirberg presents to us the tragic charm which it exerts upon those who are saturated with love for its traditions and are fettered to it even when their soul yearns for the larger world, Steinberg opens for us wide vistas of the ghetto life and reveals to us its joys, sorrows, heights and depths in an illuminating way and with great skill.

Steinberg was born in a small Bessarabian town and raised in a Hassidic environment. For some time after his marriage he resided in Rumania where he found his way to the movement of enlightenment, but he soon came back to Bessarabia where he engaged for a great part of his life in the teaching of Hebrew. It was only after he had acquired fame as a writer that he succeeded in eking out a meager living from literary pursuits, and this change of occupation brought also a change of residence to the large city of Odessa. There he spent a number of years until he was overtaken by an early death at the age of forty-four.

His life was thus, as we can see, narrow and greatly limited. It is also doubtful whether his secular and literary education was extensive and manifold. But what he lacked in worldly accomplishments and variety of life experiences, he made up by poetic feeling, by a thorough knowledge of the world in which he moved, by his sympathy with his heroes, by his world view which was wholly saturated with the Jewish spirit, and by his instinctive psychologic sense which, though unscientific, was yet penetrating.

It is these qualities which mainly contribute to the import and value of

Steinberg's works. Unlike Frishman, who was a man of the world and whose interest in his heroes was primarily artistic, Steinberg was very close to the people he describes and his genuine sympathy with their tragedies and struggles imparts a certain vividness to his stories, compensating for his lack of artistic finesse. This sympathy originated in his thoroughly Jewish view of life in which there was much of what is best in Hassidism with its aspiration to sanctity and spiritual beauty and its condemnation of any deviation from that ideal as a lowering and degradation. But man is frail and life is strewn with snares, and hence these little tragedies which our author bewails, or on the other hand, the small joys in which he participates. His psychology, as said, is not of the scientific brand which analyzes human emotions in their minutest details without omitting a link in the long chain, but of the intuitive character, flashlike, illuminating only a corner of the soul, but that corner with a strong glow. Hence he excels primarily in short stories and still more in brief sketches which are often only several pages in length. He tried his hand at longer stories and even at novels but was much less successful in these attempts, with the probable exception of one which will be discussed below.

Steinberg was thoroughly Jewish in his views and so were his world and his heroes. The young Jew who emancipated himself from Jewish life wholly or partially finds little place in his stories; only one or two of such types are dealt with and even those are only superficially emancipated. Most of his heroes are simple people who bear their Judaism and the burden it imposes naturally and even with joy. The life reflected in his stories is complete and many-sided, for the persons he describes hail from all classes—Rabbis, merchants, workingmen, teachers, and clerks, each one of them illuminating a phase of that life. The episodes he portrays are not extraordinary nor are they distinguished by strong passion or deep pathos. On the contrary, they are of daily occurrence, but because of their simplicity and ordinary character, they hold great interest for all, when the light of the author's psychological analysis is flashed upon them. In fact, in spite of their Jewishness, many of the stories have a universal ring, for after all life in its simpler form constitutes a unity, and similar emotions evoke similar responses in the hearts of all men. Of course, the peculiar Jewish situation adds flavor to many of his stories and imparts to them special value. Thus the Hassidic stories contribute much to the folkloristic current in Hebrew literature which began with Perez (Sec. 65)

and gradually found many followers. They add a particular eddy in that current. Similarly, do we find in some of his stories the echo of the heartrending events in Russian Jewish history—the pogroms—which produced a type of literature unknown to any other people. Steinberg's purpose, however, is not to depict the horrors of the events, but to throw a stronger light on some of their tragic results. A particularly valuable trait in his stories is that the interest arises often not from the psychological analysis but from the situation itself which, though ordinary, becomes, by concentrating our attention upon it, extraordinary.

This particular trait is manifested in a number of stories of which *Asher ben Asher* is an outstanding illustration. Asher Braunstein, the subject of the story, is lying on his death bed, for it is the last day of his life according to the pronouncement of his physicians. He is fully conscious of his condition and knows that his hours are numbered, but his thoughts are centered not on death but on an event which is going on in another part of the house, the circumcision of his newly-born child. At that moment the twenty years of his married life pass before him. He recalls his continued longing for a child, his dread of dying without issue with none to recite the *Kaddish* after he is gone, and his refusal to follow the law enjoined by the Rabbis to divorce his wife after ten years of childless marriage. All this flits before him. And now that his life's desire has been fulfilled his own life is about to terminate. In the other room, the ceremony goes on, but as the child is about to be named, the cantor pauses and the Rabbi makes a hasty visit to the sick room where Asher is breathing his last. The child is named Asher ben Asher after the father who expires at that moment. Such episodes occur in life, yet when our attention is focused upon the point of contact between a life terminating and a life beginning its course as a fulfillment of the one just closed, we are impressed and we involuntarily reflect upon the fleetness of human life and its tragedies.

A psychological problem of a different nature is presented in another story, *Teshubah* (A Reply). Hayyimke, an emotional youth, saturated with the noble teachings of the Agada and a great admirer of the meek and peace-loving Hillel and Beruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, distinguished for her spirit of forgiveness, enters the Russian gymnasium. There his idealistic conception of life receives a jolt. He is called Zhid by his colleagues. He does not at first grasp its meaning but later learns

its full significance and is grieved at the evil in the world. He is, however, doomed to greater disappointment. Moved by childish curiosity he stealthily attends several lessons in the instruction of the Christian religion by the priest and there he hears that it enjoins the practice of mercy, forgiveness, and humility. He wonders at the similarity of these doctrines to his own, and when his Christian friends tell him that their God is merciful, not like the God of the Jews, he protests vigorously and quotes Hillel and Beruria. His colleagues assert that they too were Christians; he, however, refuses to give up his heroes. He is baffled by the breach between the ideal teachings of that religion and the hard realities of life and he feels lonely in a world full of joy and exuberance of youth. But worse still, he sees the same contradiction in his parents' home. On observing its life closely, he notices that there too there is little of forgiveness, mercy, and strict honesty. Bewildered he asks himself, Is it possible that the Jews too have repudiated the teachings of Hillel and Beruria and the other noble characters, or is it indeed true that they were not Jews. He propounds his question to his Hebrew teacher and waits for an answer, but the answer does not come. And the reader is brought face to face with the great problem of the rift between the ideals and the realities of life.

The antagonism between the ideal and the real is also brought out in another story, *Nizoz Kadosh* (The Holy Spark), but from a different angle and on a wider scale. It is the story of the life of a Rabbi by the name of Hanoḳ. Rabbi Hanoḳ is a holy man and leads an ascetic life; but he was not always that way for his asceticism is the result of a deep struggle. He was born in a Bessarbaian village and loved the wide fields and the green forests; he also loved to play with the Christian children, but more than all to play with his cousin, Shifra. At the age of nine he was torn away from this life and brought to the Rabbi's house to begin his studies. Slowly the old life receded and Hanoḳ became the diligent student and ultimately the scholar. From time to time, the dim picture of Shifra fluttered before his eyes, but in his acquired piety he tried to forget her. When the Rabbi died, he succeeded him and also married his daughter, while Shifra married another man. A trip to the fields in discharge of a religious duty awakened in him memories of his youth and the picture of Shifra as well. From that time on the old love was revived in his heart; he struggled with his sinful thoughts but in vain. He, Hassid that he was, finally began to idealize the image of Shifra and thought her beauty the source of all

beauty and love in the world. He persuaded himself that he loved not Shifra but that spark imprisoned and reflected in her face. Meanwhile his wife died and his struggles became more severe. To make matters worse, Shifra's husband left her and joined the Boer army in South Africa and a report came that he was killed. The father of the young *Agunah* came to the Rabbi with a request that he declare her a widow officially and even hinted at the possibility of marriage of the widowed Rabbi and his daughter. A new struggle broke out in the Rabbi's heart. The problem was a difficult one. Some codifiers decided in favor of declaring her a widow, and others opposed it. Other complications arose. Hanok worked hard, scanned authorities, weighed opinions, and finally decided in favor of her release. But then his piety arose in protest. Was not all this labor intended for his own benefit? He then, after another severe struggle, abjured her to himself and handed his uncle the permit for Shifra to marry. A year later he officiated at her second marriage, and when he looked upon her, he was astonished at the real Shifra who appeared gross and material with no trace of the ideal image and no vestige of the holy spark which he had worshipped and loved. Why then all these struggles? he silently asked himself. The conflicts in the Rabbi's heart are drawn by the author in a masterful way.

A story, a very brief one, which illustrates quite emphatically the economic baselessness of the Russian Jew and his constant dread of the loss of his meager source of income is *Aba Meir, Melamed*. Aba Meir was a poor Hebrew teacher in a small town, while all the other members of his family were rich merchants. His wife reproached him for his lack of ambition, but his reply was always that teaching is certain while business is hazardous. Jews will always need teachers, but as for business, who knows the turn of fortune. He dreaded to remain without *Parnasah* (sustenance)—that magic word on the lips of the ghetto Jews. The fear of its loss became a mania with Aba Meir, for he still remembered the days when he was without work. Finally, he was persuaded by his wife and his brothers to forsake the *Melamdut* and join his brothers and the other relatives in business in a large city. He prospered but would not continue in business, for he saw that the ramified enterprises of his family were all dependent upon the good will of a count who owned forests, mills, and distilleries and he feared that the count might suddenly die or go bankrupt and all would end in failure. He returned to his *Melamdut*. Years later he visited his

relatives again, and lo, the count had died, but the members of his family were still prospering. They were engaged in other businesses and were again dependent upon the good will of one man, a manufacturer of clothing. He observed their prosperity, their spendthriftiness, and their high living, and he was puzzled pondering upon the problem how people could spend a life time in occupations which depended on chance. A problem too difficult for Aba Meir to solve. Ah, for the certainty of *Parnasah*!

The echo of the tragedy of pogroms reverberates with bitter irony and a kind of *Galgenhumor* in the sketch, *Brit Milah* (Circumcision). A grandchild is about to be circumcised in the house of Sarah the widow. The child was born out of wedlock to her daughter Braina, but no one chides her for it. On the contrary, all are kind to her, and even the old Rabbi of the town attends the *Brit*, for the child is the result of an outrage during the pogrom. Only Braina cries without ceasing; she rebels against giving the child her sainted father's name. The Rabbi cites Abraham who was the son of an idol worshipper; Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, who was outraged by Schechem, the son of Hamor, and many other examples. Braina is comforted but now comes the finale. In the kitchen there stands Zelda, the cook, and watches the scene with jealousy. She remembers her anxiety the previous year when the same thing happened to her while serving in a rich man's home. How much shame, how much suffering she endured! But this girl, all treat kindly and even the Rabbi comforts her. She concludes that Braina must be very lucky. Verily, the luck of a Jewish girl who passed through a pogrom.

The events of the early years of the century which, besides being an era of pogroms and suffering for Russian Jewry, was also one of enthusiasm for the rising national movement, are reflected in a number of Steinberg's stories. In one called by the peculiar name *Lo le-Elohim we-lo le-Anashim* (One not favored by God or Man), we see two different types, father and son. The father is a man who is pleasing to all; he conducts himself properly at home, obeys the laws, and is liked by the community. He is modern, and appears as a liberal when in the company of younger people, especially in that of the Gentile officials who visit his store. He opposes no one; his children follow the same course with the exception of his youngest son who emphasizes his Judaism and carries on his Zionist activities openly. The father counsels moderation but he only smiles. One Hanukkah night as he lights

the candles, the police inspector enters, whereupon he immediately extinguishes them. When questioned by the inspector he emphatically denies that he lit the candles. But at that very moment the resounding voice of the son is heard reciting the benediction with pride and exultation over the candles which he had relit. Thus the characterlessness of the semi-modern, middle class Russian Jew and the proud nationalism of the rising younger generation are contrasted with each other. In another story, the arousing of Messianic hopes in the heart of Abraham Solomon, a Jew of the old generation, by the Zionist movement is artistically drawn. From his early youth he waited for the Messiah and redemption. His occupation as a teacher he considered only temporary, ever hoping that at any moment the Messiah might come and transport him and all the other Jews to Palestine. He built a house but was ready to sell at a moment's notice. He waited a lifetime but in vain. It was only at the end of his days that he saw in his son's home groups of people, among them Hassidim and enlightened, long-bearded and smoothly-shaven, all enthused and in exalted spirits. He senses that something new has come into life. And when he is told of the Zionist movement and is shown the picture of Herzl, he is puzzled and thinks that perhaps the *Keẓ*, the end of the exile has already come. When he is convinced of it a light is diffused upon his withered face. Now that the long-awaited redemption is here, he is ready to die. Steinberg thus pictures in his numerous stories all phases of the life of the ghetto of Russia where the old and the new met and often made peace with each other, each story revealing to us a hidden corner of that limited but many-sided life.

Steinberg also wrote a number of stories which he labelled Hassidic, most likely in conformity with the fashion prevalent in the later period of modern Hebrew literature to see in Hassidic life the typical Jewish expression. In reality, however, they differ little from his other stories, for the Hassidic strain is in great evidence in all his characters. In general, the elemental trait in Hassidism is the joy at the observance of a *Mizwah*. A *Mizwah*, it is held, is not a command which one can obey at will, but is the very purpose of the life of the Jew, for according to its view, the Jew was created in order to observe the precepts. The reward one may expect is a secondary matter. The Hassidim of Steinberg are not fanatics but ordinary men. They have their good and bad points and sin is not unknown among them. They have their struggles with their *Yeẓer ha-Ra* quite frequently, but they also often have the

upper hand, for their desire for good is elemental with them. This theme is particularly illustrated in one of the Ḥassidic stories, *Yeruḥam Fishel Hannister*. Yeruḥam Fishel is a rich man but does not appear so for he dresses poorly and lives modestly. He loves money and is known as a miser, yet he often gives large sums to charity, for the *Mizwah* is considered greater the more one hates to part with his money. He is hospitable but feeds his guests poorly. He treats his relatives badly, never lends them any money except to one, Ḥayyim Aaron, whom he dislikes for his liberal ideas. He justifies his actions by saying that his relatives must not rely upon him but upon God, and his loans to Aaron Ḥayyim are made only because he enjoys the discomfiture of the poor liberal when he cannot pay his debts. Once Yeruḥam Fishel lost a sum of money at which he was grieved very much. When the poor liberal who found it returned it to him, he was overwhelmed by the act, but joy and sorrow battled in his heart. As a money lover he rejoiced at the return of his loss, but was grieved that such a *Mizwah* should fall to the share of an *Apikoros*, a heretic. He offered the finder a tenth of the sum as a reward, and when the latter haughtily refused, his animosity towards him increased tenfold. He, the heretic, should earn such a *Mizwah*!

Our author, as mentioned, also wrote several novels but without success with the exception of one entitled *ba-Yomim ha-Hém* (in Those Days). It can be called a novel only by courtesy, for the plot is simple and the characters few. It is the recital of the life of one of the Jewish soldiers during the regime of Nicholas I who were recruited as children and until the age of eighteen lived in the homes of peasants where they were prepared for the life of a soldier and a Christian. The aged soldier, Samuel, relates his vicissitudes; how he was seized forcibly by the official, later freed and then exchanged by his parents for his older brother, *Simḥah* the *Shoḥet*, who was married; of his life in the house of his Christian patron; of his own struggles and those of his friends to cling to Judaism in spite of all suffering; and finally of his participation in the Crimean war, and his return home. There is not much psychological analysis in the novel, but the story itself has a certain charm and the struggles of these young martyrs reveal to us a pathetic phase in the life of the Russian Jews in the middle of the last century. It is a record of martyrdom undergone by Jewish children who displayed great stoicism and bravery for the sake of the religion of their youth. Many, of course, fell by the wayside and forsook Judaism but many

also withstood the ordeal. Besides the narrator, another character who holds our interest is Marusa, the young daughter of Peter, Samuel's patron. She is drawn to the Jewish boy partly out of curiosity and partly out of sympathy, and the two spend much time together during a large part of their adolescence. Marusa saves our hero from many whippings and lashings which the military discipline at the time meted out for any slight offense including the practice of Jewish customs, and also shields him from the wrath of her mother, Anna, who persecutes the recruit. It develops that Anna was a converted Jewess and was herself a sufferer on account of her origin, and she therefore mistreats Samuel who reminds her of her past. The daughter shared in the tragedy of her mother, for she also was often called by the opprobrious name, *Zhidowka*, and that brought her still nearer to the young soldier. The friendship ripened into love, but Samuel did not forsake Judaism even for the sake of love. Marusa, however, remained faithful and never married. Characteristic of Samuel is the fact that he bore no malice towards his military superiors who often lashed him mercilessly, for he saw in their acts merely a discharge of duty which, as a soldier, he knew how to value. On the contrary, he points out in his narrative their good points and accompanies the mention of their names with a blessing. The story, as a whole, is distinguished by a naturalness and by a spirit of genuine sympathy which pervades it. It was translated into English by George Yeshurun.

Steinberg is also known as a prolific writer of children's stories and as a fabulist. He was quite successful in his first endeavor, for he possessed the necessary power of imagination and an insight into the soul of the child. His stories were read avidly by the younger generation. He does not, however, distinguish himself as a fabulist, though his collection, *ba'lr u-ba-Yaar* (City and Forest), which was his first published work, called forth at the time much praise from critics and writers. His fables are on the whole trite, and over-long and prosaic. Nor are they distinguished by Jewish characteristics, as are those of J. L. Gordon (Vol. III, p. 253). They also lack pointedness and the particular style of the fable. His contemporaries undoubtedly found in them symbolic references to the Russian Czaristic regime, but later readers find little of a universal and elevating quality. His fame rests primarily on his short stories and on one or two novels.

10. S. BEN-ZION

Closely resembling Steinberg in the content of his stories but differing in method and technique is another gifted short story writer better known by his pseudonym, S. Ben-Zion, than by his real name, S. A. Guttman (1870-1930). He likewise hailed from Bessarabia. The environment in which Ben-Zion was raised and in which he lived was the same as that of Steinberg, the small Bessarabian town, and it is the same type of life which is revealed to us in his stories except that the background is more extensive and the canvas on which he draws his pictures is larger. Ben-Zion is primarily a short story writer but he is not satisfied with a mere sketch of an episode in the life of his characters, and rather seeks to present a complete picture of their lives, though in a succinct way. He excels Steinberg in power of description which is both detailed and forceful. On the other hand, he is inferior to the former in psychological observation, and fails to note the important moments as several of his stories show. However, his fuller description and his improved technique in combining numerous details in an harmonious whole make up for the lack of psychological penetration.

The life depicted in his stories is that of the Russian ghetto in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The economic situation of Bessarabian Jews was, in earlier times, somewhat better than that of the Lithuanian Jews as many of them were engaged in the cultivation of vineyards or the planting of tobacco and other agricultural pursuits, and their livelihood was not as basisless as those of their brethren in Lithuania. But the May decrees, which forbade the Jews the possession or farming of land in villages, as well as other discriminations, undermined their economic position and the struggle for *Parnasah* became as bitter and as keen as in any small ghetto town in the Pale of Settlement. The situation became worse after the great wave of emigration to America set in, for many towns were partially emptied of their inhabitants, and those who remained spent a large part of their time trying to find a possible profitable transaction.

Spiritually the town was likewise stagnant as there was little change in its life. There was no more warfare between the staunch Orthodox and the *Maskilim*; a kind of truce was effected between the two, for life proved stronger than fanaticism. Hassidism still held sway, and

life ran its regular course; the new and the old made peace. The younger people, who strove towards a fuller and wider life, often cut tragic figures in this circumscribed and drab existence. It is these two types of struggles, the material and the quasi-spiritual that are the content of most of Ben-Zion's stories. In those which were written later in life, the echo of the changes introduced by Zionism is heard and others are overcast by the dark shadow of the pogroms. The majority of the leading characters still belong to the old generation; it is only in the nationalistic stories that the modern young Jew comes into his own.

The collected works in two volumes, published in 1914, contain three cycles of stories each under a different title, the first bearing the label *be-Dor Yoréd* (In a Generation of Decline). This cycle pictures mainly the struggle for *Parnasah* going on in the small town, the obtaining of a livelihood. Nisi, the principal character in the story *'Ish ha-Kahal* (A Public Man) typifies that struggle. Nisi never had a particular occupation and was a self-elected representative of the Jewish community. With a knowledge of Russian and with an instinct for public affairs, he became a self-proclaimed assistant to the elected officials. They, in turn, recognizing his usefulness in numerous instances, gave him a chance to earn a few roubles on occasion, and often divided with him certain public incomes. Times however changed. The community grew poorer and smaller in number as many had emigrated; knowledge of Russian became widespread, and his assistance in writing official documents was dispensed with, and the officials became bolder and ceased to divide with him the occasional public "income." Nisi still preserved his dignity; daily he strolled through the town seeking a possible opportunity, but it seldom came. Want and poverty entered his house. He bore this with equanimity, but even suffering has its limits, and one Thursday evening the possibility of going hungry on the Sabbath stared him in the face. To hunger on the Sabbath was the acme of suffering for the ghetto Jew. He was, on the whole, used to fasting, but to desecrate the Sabbath by hunger was misery magnified tenfold. Nisi tried all means to obtain several roubles; he pleaded with the Jewish alderman, Shamai, for a possible manipulation in the matter of issuing a passport to a stranger but in vain. In despair he resolved to do a thing which he had never done before. He entered the house of the *'Agunah* who farmed the right of selling yeast from the community, persuaded her that there was a flaw in her contract and

offered to remedy the defect for a fee of three roubles. With the three roubles in his pocket Nisi returned home, but as he plodded through the mud in the dark night, there was greater darkness in his soul, for he felt the ugliness of the transaction and the moral degradation, and murmured, "Oh, how I have fallen." He saved the honor of the Sabbath at the price of his soul.

The same struggle for a livelihood is also represented in the story, *Ḥayyim Shel Parnasah* (A Life of Parnasah, one of the requests uttered in the prayer for the new month). This time, however, the principal character, Tubia, is not a white collar proletarian but a hard-working man, a Bessarabian Jew who loves the black soil of his native land and makes it yield a poor living. He is a tobacco planter and introduces this culture in the midst of the wine belt where it was unknown before. Yet it is all in vain; poverty and misfortune dog him at every step. The decree of the government prohibiting Jews to farm land, the burning of his tobacco plants by his Greek competitor, the persecution of the revenue officer, all combine to thwart his efforts. He dies of a broken heart and tuberculosis contracted from cutting tobacco in a damp cellar. His widow, Hasia, continues the struggle in order to raise her son, but she also succumbs, ensnared by an anti-Semitic revenue officer, an inveterate enemy of Jewish tobacco dealers. She is accused of selling unbonded tobacco and is sent to prison. The struggle passes on to the son. He is more alert and energetic than his parents were and continues to sell unbonded tobacco to the chagrin of the revenue officer, while waiting for the happy day when he and his mother will emigrate to America. Thus the vicissitudes of a family are drawn in all their details and pathetic meanderings. Yet even this rather dark picture is tinged with streaks of light which illuminate the sombre and misery-laden Jewish life. These are the implicit faith of the Ḥassid in his Rabbi, the fleeting days of the Sabbath and holidays, and the hopes the poor, hard-working mothers entertain that their sons who study the word of God will become scholars in Israel, hopes for the realization of which no effort was spared. Even the poorest of the poor would borrow money on interest to pay the teacher.

The loneliness which entered many homes after the mass emigration is skilfully portrayed in the idyll, *Zekenim* (Old People), wherein the life of an old couple, Daniel and Braindel, whose children are scattered to the ends of the earth—Argentina, Chicago, Odessa, and other places—is pictured in all its pathos and serenity. The noble love between

husband and wife purified of all passion, the outgrowth of a lifelong devotion, the purity of Jewish family life, and the tenderness expressed in their conduct toward each other are all reflected in the story. They are partners not only in life but also in business, for they still run a small store from which they draw a living. During the day their time is occupied, but at night loneliness grips them, especially on the Sabbath and holidays. One scene is especially charming, that of Hanukkah night. Daniel comes home from the synagogue and lights the candles; warmth, light, and peace pervade the little house and the old couple feel pleased with each other; but soon loneliness creeps upon them, and to escape it they play "Dreidel" (a children's Hanukkah game) and exchange "Hanukkah money" with each other just as if their children and grandchildren were with them, and thus with mutual love they dull the sting of their loneliness.

In spite of the drabness and ugliness of the external aspect of the ghetto, its inner life had many bright spots, but it also had several unattractive features. The most notable of the latter were the autocracy of the fathers over their children, especially over their sons, and the severity of the régime in the Hebrew school or *Heder*. The intention on the part of these petty tyrants was in both cases good. Both the father and the teacher wanted to impress their pattern of life upon the child who would succeed them in the spiritual heritage. Torah is a difficult thing to acquire, the "sea of the Talmud" is wide and deep, and unless the young swimmer is trained in harsh discipline, he will be lost in its depths. Nor is piety a thing easily gained. It is a daily routine embracing the minutiae of life, and the parents who wanted to make good Jews of their sons thought that they were doing their duty when they forced the lives of their young children into a mould fitted only for older people who assumed their burden willingly and naturally. The results, however, were not always salutary. The repressed soul of the child often rebelled against the harshness of the regime of the *Heder* where switching and other corporal punishments were not unknown as well as against the autocracy of the parents, and often bore deep resentment, especially towards the teacher.

This rebellion against the harshness, authority, and autocracy of both teacher and father, as well as the feelings and struggles of an emotional child against his environment is artfully depicted by our author in his autobiographical narrative, *Nefesh Rezuzah* (The Repressed Soul). It is a story of the life of a child, the son of Hono, the

son of the Rabbi, a poor scholarly storekeeper who is zealous for the honor of the name he bears and is scrupulous in his piety as befits the son of a famous Rabbi. We are presented with the details of that life which, though narrow, yet has many phases and shadings. We sympathize with the youngster in his rebellion against the father who deprives him of play and children's pleasures; we almost agree with him in the malice he bears his teacher, Homile, who punishes him severely because he is distracted from the difficult Talmudic discussion on the laws of purity and impurity by the alluring charms of the green fields and stately trees seen through the windows. The narrative is written with skill and deep psychological penetration into the soul of the child. He struggles with his rebellious spirit and with his phantasies and visions among which there is also the image of a young girl, his cousin Perele, who captivated his young heart. As if to spite him, these visions appear before him in the midst of the study of an intricate Talmudic subject and the result is confusion and ultimately severe punishment.

He rebels against everybody, his teacher, his father, the heavy folios of the Talmud, but especially against the long prayers, and at times against the God to whom the prayers are offered. Why, he asks himself, does the great God need the recitation of the prayers daily? What gain has He if they are recited three times daily from the Siddur? Does He not know all this from last year, ten years, or even a hundred years ago? He tries to silence these heretical thoughts but they recur again and again. And thus is the soul of a child revealed to us in its innermost thoughts and feelings. There is much in the story which can be understood only by those who have themselves lived through these experiences, but also much which is universal and general to all children. On the whole, the narrative reflects faithfully the life of the Jewish child in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The second cycle is entitled *be-Dor Ober* (In a Generation of Transition) and contains a number of short stories and one long one, almost a novel, all of which reflect the life of the town in the Pale of Settlement during the period of transition from the older stage into the more modern one. Chronologically it corresponds to the first decade of the present century when even the most backward town was already affected by the new movements in the Jewish world, Zionism and socialism. Yet the older life is still struggling for existence, and at times its apathy, sluggishness, and conservatism overcome the rebellious

energy of the younger people who are anxious to burst the chains of habit, custom, and education and turn from the beaten path into a new one. The cry of the Jewish youth in the "town" is like that of their predecessors, the youth of the Haskalah period, "Life! Life!" but there is a different ring to it. The latter meant by life knowledge, or at best a life more normal in its externals; to the former, however, it had a deeper, though a less definite meaning. It meant rebellion against the entire ghetto life, nay even against Judaism itself and its age-long values. It is the cry for change of values (Shinui Erekin) which reverberated for a long time in Hebrew literature, and of which we will hear more. This rebellion, because of the indefiniteness of its purpose and also because the path to a new life was often hemmed in by many discriminations and strewn with pitfalls, was not a salutary one. Many of the youths who were seized by the passion for life but could not, for reasons given above, find their way to it, remained maladjusted members of Jewish society. Fortunately for that generation, Zionism, and to a certain extent, socialism saved a large number of these youths. They supplied them with ideals and showed them the way towards healthy constructive work among their own brethren, whereby they would regenerate Jewish life and themselves.

These movements and tendencies are depicted skilfully by Ben-Zion in his story, *me-Eber le-Hayyim* (Beyond Life). The principle character, Haikel Gelfan, is one of the maladjusted. Like many of his kind, he passes through the usual stages; he rebels against the orthodoxy of his parents' home, emancipates himself from the burden of tradition, and after the death of his parents goes to Odessa in search of the things he is thirsting for. But there disappointment awaits him. He begins to prepare himself for entrance examinations at the gymnasium, and to support himself gives Hebrew lessons. He never attains his end, for he has no definite aim. He merely exchanged the *Bet ha-Midrash* for the library, and his voracious and promiscuous reading confuses him, makes him cynical and ill-adjusted to any movement. He finally decides to leave for America and occupy himself with physical labor which he considers an anchor in life. He returns to his native town to sell the house which he inherited from his parents and there he meets his cousin Rosa, an idealistic girl who spends her time in spreading the ideal of Zionism among the women of the town and in educating the children. She is greatly encouraged in her work by a young man, Shurzman, a Zionist like herself, who had given up a career in order

to work among his people. Gelfan falls in love with his cousin, but feels instinctively the rivalry of Shurzman and fears him greatly. At first he decides to battle for his love and win Rosa. However, on observing the certainty of Shurzman's aim in life, his self-reliance and strength of character in contrast with his own shiftlessness, Gelfan loses courage and returns to Odessa to his purposeless existence. We have thus in the three characters typical representatives of Jewish Russian youth before the War. It was not the fault of Gelfan and thousands of other youths like him that they lost their way in life, but it was due to a combination of circumstances. Rosa and Shurzman, the prototypes of the later *Haluzim* have, of course, the sympathy of the author and also our own, for they typify that ideal which saved many young Jews and Jewesses from the spiritual chaos in which they found themselves.

Very touching and pathetic are the few stories included in the third cycle called *mi-Tok ha-Hafekah* (From the Chaos). These are pogrom stories but they strike upon a different note from the usual run of such stories. There are no cries and tears for the dead and maimed, nor even hysterical outbursts over the outraged honor of Jewish maidens, but the expression of pain over outrages of a different kind, outrages to sacred feelings hallowed by age-long tradition and insults to objects of deep veneration. *Miktob Gadol li-Katabah* (She Wrote Me a Long Letter) purports to give the contents of a letter written by a young girl to her friend relating an episode of her life. She tells of her childhood with her parents and grandparents in the peaceful home of a leading, pious Jewish family in a quiet town. The peace, however, is disturbed by death; Meir, the only son of her grandparents died and mourning reigned in the house for a long time. A scroll of the Torah was written in the name of Meir and this scroll symbolized to the older people as well as to the little girl the embodiment of the soul of Meir. They guarded it above all treasures, carried it under the canopy to the synagogue, and it thus became part and parcel of the life of every member of the family and of the writer in its various stages, childhood, adolescence, and youth. One day, while a student in Berne, she received a letter informing her that her family had been saved in a pogrom, but there was enclosed in that letter a memento of the pogrom, a piece of parchment of Meir's Torah with blotches of congealed black blood. The memento tells its own tale. Of a similar memento we are told in another story. The narrator is a youth who tells of his grandmother's treasure which was kept in a chest and shown

to the grandchildren on rare occasions. In that chest there were family heirlooms of all kinds, but the treasure most guarded was a little white bag half-filled with earth, Palestinian soil.* It once had been full, but when the grandfather died she buried the half of it with him and left half for herself. The children kissed the treasure and the old lady put it back. After the pogrom they found her in the barn, her head split open, the bag empty, and blood sprinkled on a brick. The grandson took the bag and a part of the brick. He is certain of the bag, but not of the blood; he does not know whether it is the blood of the grandmother or of her favorite calf which was killed at the same time.

Thus did Ben-Zion reflect in his stories the vicissitudes of Jewish life in his time, especially the life of the town in its decline and in its transformation.

11. THE REALISTIC TENDENCY

It is really impossible to draw hard and fast lines in the history of Hebrew belletristic literature of the period and divide it according to tendencies in chronological order, for in reality, the various tendencies existed simultaneously. It is primarily a group division. There were certain groups of writers whose general characteristics can be described as idealistic-romantic and whose inclination was, on the whole, to point out the finer side in the Jewish life of the ghetto, and on the other hand, there were writers who were more inclined to picture that life in a natural and realistic way. These were the realists, and the writers hitherto discussed neither preceded nor succeeded them, but lived and worked side by side with them.

Yet there was a time in the history of that literature when the realistic tendency was in the ascendancy and the critical and publicistic literature resounded with cries for a change in expression or with demands for fiction closer to life and more penetrating in the examination of its mysteries. These demands were, however, not only limited to a desire for change in method and content of the stories or novels, but really aimed at a complete change in the entire character of Hebrew literature of which belletristics was only a part. In fact, they reflected a movement which was denoted at the time by a name borrowed from the German, *ha-Mehalek ha-Hadash* (The New Way in Literature).

* It was the cherished desire of every pious Jew and Jewess to obtain a handful of soil of Palestine for the purpose of having it placed beneath their heads in the grave.

The first rumblings of this movement were heard early in the nineties of the last century. It arose primarily through the influence of the German and Russian literatures which were read and studied by the young Hebrew writers, but also partly, as was pointed out above, through the rise of the nationalistic ideal. If we are a nation like all other nations, so ran the arguments of the proponents of the movement, and if our literature is to be an expression of our national genius, then it should not be enclosed within the boundaries of Jewish life, but should reflect all the strivings of humanity and satisfy the demands of the modern Jew. The champions of the "New Way," therefore, demanded a broadening of Hebrew literature to the inclusion of discussions of general human problems, translations of the best works of European writers, and in general its secularization as far as possible. They also sought a change in the form and content of fiction, namely that it be more realistic and descriptive, and that it apply the psychological methods current in European literature to the analysis of character, and further that the stories contain a reflection of the ideas and the problems of the period irrespective of whether these agree with traditional conceptions or not. In general, they asserted, fiction must be a complete record of the life of the characters, external as well as internal. The slogan was "art and creation." There is nothing ugly in life if it be depicted artistically, and there is nothing unseemly if it be drawn with creative skill. As a result of these conceptions, there began to appear stories and novels in which the life of the younger generation outside of the town or ghetto was reflected and depicted in all its phases, open and covert. Love was no more pictured in its ideal aspect only, but also in its grosser phase, as a passion, and eroticism became a frequent feature of realistic fiction. Along with it there was the conflict in the soul of the young between the traditional upbringing and the motley of new ideas, such as socialism, nihilism, and complete individualism, which occupied an important place. In short, there arose a type of characters who, in their experiences, reflected the chaos which had entered into the lives of the youth both in Russia and in the university cities of Western Europe whither they flocked during the period before the War. The town, however, was not entirely neglected, for these characters were not limited to the large city; much of that chaos also penetrated the smaller town. The depiction of these characters, in their swaying between various movements, their emancipation from tradition, their iconoclasm, their theorizing, their submission to passion,

and their suffering from want and economic baselessness was true enough to life and certain authors evinced great artistic skill in their narratives. Still, whether it was due to the narrowness of the life of these characters, or to its superficiality and shallowness, or to the limitations of the authors who could not fathom that life to its very depths and present us with universal problems, the fact remains that the realistic and naturalistic tendency in Hebrew fiction quickly ran its course and a reaction set in. Writers began to turn once more for subjects and themes for their stories to the more complete Jewish life of the near past. We may assert, however, that the realistic-naturalistic tendency, besides producing a number of high grade literary productions, brought much good—excepting the extreme eroticism of some writers as well as the decadent tendency of others—to Hebrew fiction. It taught the writers the art of description and also the power of psychological analysis, and freed the Hebrew style from much of its Haskalah euphuism. One of the demands of the champions of the “New Way” was also that the Hebrew language be enriched with new words and expressions and that its style be simplified and liberated from the burden of Biblical phraseology and flowery expressions (*Melizah*). They asked for a vocabulary, elastic as well as simple, which should express the nuances of life in as precise and clear a fashion as possible. We must also place to its credit the creation of the novel. The fiction of the first epoch of the post-Haskalah period consisted for a long time primarily of short stories. It is the realists who reintroduced the novel into Hebrew fiction.

However, all that was said about the realistic tendency applies to its characterization as a whole, and to a great extent, to its later development. Its beginnings were small and its demands more modest. Fortunately, these modest demands found an energetic champion who was not satisfied with merely voicing his views but also began to realize them himself in literature, and thus became in a way the father of Hebrew realism.

12. BEN AVIGDOR AND HIS FOLLOWERS

In reality, the new way had many originators for there were a number of writers who wanted to widen the boundaries of Hebrew literature and impart to it a more general character. But the two that gave to these strivings the most concrete expression were Reuben

Brainin (1862-1939) and L. Shalkowitz, better known by his pen-name, Ben Avigdor, and of the two, the latter was the more energetic.

Ben Avigdor (1862-1920) was born and spent his early youth in the town of Zaludek in the province of Wilna. His education was the customary Talmudic one, and he spent much time in various *Yeshivot* preparing himself for the Rabbinate. His plans, however, did not materialize and instead he became active in the incipient *Hobebé Zion* movement and for a time acted as secretary for the idealistic fraternal order, founded by Ahad ha-'Am (Sec. 119), the *Bené Moshe*. He made his literary debut in the year 1889 in the *ha-Meliẓ* with general articles and subsequently published there also short stories. He was dissatisfied with the state of Hebrew literature at the time and began to preach reform. The principal reform he advocated was that the stories deal more with the present life of the Jewish people rather than with that of the near past and that they depict life as it is. He also championed the creation of a popular literature at a modest price which should appeal to a large number of readers.

Being endowed with a sense for practical enterprises and with much energy, he at first published several series of short stories called *Sifré Agorah* (Penny Books). His venture was a success and it was followed by another on a larger scale, the establishment of a publishing company called *Ahiasaf*, which occupies an honorable place in Hebrew literature. It published during the thirty years of its existence a large number of books, both fiction and non-fiction, of high literary value including many translations of important historical, biographical, and philosophical works from the European languages. Ben Avigdor, though, was only the manager of that company and after several years left it and devoted himself to his own publishing company, *Tushia* (Knowledge), which he established in 1890. For twenty-four years Ben Avigdor was the outstanding entrepreneur in the field of Hebrew literature. He published hundreds of books of various kinds, had numerous works translated from other languages, and to a large extent realized the program he set for himself, that of widening the scope of the literature of the day. Much of its remarkable progress in the first two decades of the present century may be credited to his indefatigable energy.

However, his value as a short story writer should by no means be minimized. He himself wrote a large number of the series of short stories which he issued in the early years of his activity. In these he

devotes himself primarily to depicting the life of the masses, his characters being, on the whole, drawn from the poorer stratum of the Jewish population. He pictures their extreme poverty and their desperate struggle for existence. Since he was a follower of the realistic school his description is full and detailed, but his psychological insight is inadequate. His aim was to portray the life of the Jewish street as it was; still he could not emancipate himself from idealizing it and most of his characters, therefore, display spiritual nobility in spite of the squalor and ugliness of their environment. Their inner beauty atones for the external poverty and raggedness.

Leah, Mokheret ha-Dagim (Leah the Fisher Woman), a story which opens his first series, is a skilful picture of the tumultuous life of the market of the Wilna ghetto in the nineties of the last century. We hear the quarrels among the pushcart venders for prospective buyers, the bargaining of the customers, the curses heaped upon one another by the women peddlers, and we note the ugly and degrading poverty of both the sellers and the buyers in the market place. The lot of the poor venders is made still more miserable by the tax levied upon them by the Russian policeman detailed as the guardian of the law. We are introduced to this dignitary as he makes his rounds among the carts and stalls to collect his daily tribute. But we also get a glimpse of the finer side of these peddlers. There are other collectors in the market besides the policeman—collectors for charity—for often the market women leave their wares in order to solicit among their competitors pennies for people poorer than themselves, and they are seldom refused. One of the most habitual collectors is Leah, the fisher-woman. She was not born to this trade as she was the daughter of a rich man and the wife of a once prosperous man, a scholar and leading member of the community. Reverses and the sickness of her husband brought her to this state, but she does not forget her former state. In the midst of the turmoil and curses of her competitors she thinks of her husband, the scholar, for whose sake she stooped so low. Her efforts, though, are in vain, and the sad news of his death is brought to her in the market place by her little girl. The whole story is primarily a photographic picture of a Friday morning in the Jewish market of Wilna, but one which impresses us both by its details and by the deep tragedy underlying the life of many of its inhabitants.

The same contrast of nobility of soul and external squalor and poverty is the theme of another story, *Ahabah we-Hobah* (Love and

Duty). In this Ben Avigdor pictures the life of Deborah, a seamstress, who works at her sewing machine night and day in a damp cellar in order to support her sick mother. Narrow as her life is, it had many vicissitudes; she had known love, the love of a poor student who boarded at her home and who had asked her to marry him. She had refused because of her duty to her mother, and remained in her cellar while her lover left to seek a career. Years passed and finally a letter came from him from New York asking her to join him. It was too late for she was on her death bed. "Too late," she murmured. Thus duty won against love. The character of Deborah is well drawn by the detailed description of the events of her life, the struggles of her father for a living, the development of her love for the student and her renouncement of him for the sake of her mother in spite of the protestations of the latter. The story, however, has the guise of a history of events and makes no attempt to picture the psychological process of the maiden.

We see that while Ben Avigdor aimed to depict Jewish life in its darker aspect, he insisted on emphasizing the ideal traits of his characters. This tendency is also evident in his sketch, *'Aniyyim Meushorim* (The Happy Poor), where he presents an idyll of the poor who demand little of life and who find happiness even in their narrow sphere. We are also charmed by the description of the pure but mute love between Motel, the water carrier, and Rebecca, the maid-servant, which ends in a happy marriage. The echo of the national movement is heard in the story of *Rabbi Shifra* where a new type of character is presented to us, that of a young learned Jewish woman who devotes herself to education and to the spread of the national ideal. This devotion comes as a result of an unhappy marriage forced upon her by her relatives. She later rebelled and divorced her husband, and to fill the vacuity in her life, threw herself into educational and nationalistic work. This story in itself reflects the change in Jewish life. Many were the unhappily married women, but few were those who dared to face the consequences of rebellion against their fate. Shifra represents the prototype of the later emancipated Jewish woman. The author thus gave expression to the idea that the woman also needs content in life apart from marriage and children.

As stated, the novel traits of Ben Avigdor's stories are the change of emphasis from the life of the middle class and that of the rich or the learned to that of the poor, the laborer, and the downtrodden, and

the realistic and objective method of description. It is to be noted further that the principal characters of most of his stories are women, thus giving the Jewish woman a larger part in fiction than she had hitherto occupied. These deviations from the pattern of the Hebrew short story of the eighties were bound to have great influence upon the subsequent writers. Ben Avigdor also wrote an historical novel entitled *Lifné Arba Meot Shanah* (Four Hundred Years Ago), marking the completion of four hundred years since the expulsion from Spain, as it was published in 1892. The expulsion is its theme; and there is, of course, a love affair between the hero of the book, the Marrano, Don Miguel, a young military officer, and a fair Christian maiden, Donna Clara. However, its value as historical fiction is not great. The writer lacks perspective and knowledge of the life of the period. Still, it is not without merit inasmuch as it was the first original historical novel written in Hebrew since the days of Mapu.

Ben Avigdor, as said, was not the only one who endeavored to introduce the new current into the Hebrew fiction of the period. In the series of short stories, the *Sifré Agorah*, he had a number of collaborators. However, they were not of a homogeneous character. Some of them displayed a more realistic tendency and ability, and some less. The general trait which united them all was the striving to depict contemporary life, especially that of the masses, and the emphasis upon the more material, secular and universal aspects of that life. To the better type of these early realistic writers who participated in the several series belong Reuben Brainin and J. Goida (Jacob Gorin, 1868-1925). Both pictured the life of the Jewish artisan in the Lithuanian town. Moses, the bricklayer, the hero of Brainin's story entitled *mi-Giboré Yisrael* (One of the Heroes of Israel), experiences a series of mishaps throughout his entire life; poverty, disease, and insults from his rich employers are daily occurrences. Yet he bears all these with equanimity and does not despair of realizing his cherished hope, to invent an improved type of brick. His optimism does not forsake him even after his last experiment, in which he had sunk a sum of money borrowed from his neighbors, proved a failure, and he goes on with life's battle against all odds. The heroism of Moses consists merely in his remarkable endurance of suffering and the retention of his morale under unbearable conditions. The ghetto artisans and their families made peace with hunger, cold, and sickness, and learned to disregard them. Hope was always with them. The very title of the story aims

at an idealization of the life of the poor laborer as compared with that of the rich. The writer does not neglect to stress the love of the Jewish artisan for learning, for one of the greatest comforts of Moses is the ability his son displays in the study of the Talmud.

The idealization of the dignity of manual labor is especially evidenced in Goida's story, *ha-Nagar ha-Naor* (The Intelligent Carpenter), which consists of two parts. There is a fine realistic description of the life of the artisan of the town in the first part and an ideal picture of the intelligent carpenter who had left the town and had studied for some time at the University, but who gave up his career for a life of labor. In the second part he finds in labor a dignity which supplies life with reality and creativeness. All these tendencies were, of course, an echo of the views and opinions current in the liberal and radical Russian literature. Yet, inasmuch as the younger generation was to a large extent saturated with these ideas, the stories reflected, both in their description and content, a large section of Jewish life of the time.

The other collaborators in the several series, such as N. N. Samuely, I. H. Taviow, and Z. Fridkin are writers of stories possessing little distinction. These are primarily records of incidents in the lives of the characters, at times of a humorous nature, told with more or less skill. Of special interest are the sketches of N. N. Samuely who represents the Galician school and who affords us a glimpse of Jewish life in that country which was a shade different than that of Lithuania or Poland. Most of the stories bear the general title, *Min ha-Hayyim* (Out of Life), indicating that they belong to the new realistic school, namely that they depict contemporary Jewish life. Whether the author succeeded in that is to be questioned.

13. ISAIAH BERSHADSKI

The realistic tendency, after it had made its way in Hebrew literature through the efforts of Ben Avigdor and his followers, found full expression in the novels and short stories of Isaiah Domashevitzki, or as he is better known by his pen-name, Bershadski (1871-1910). He represents a new type of Hebrew writer. Unlike other Hebrew writers, he never visited the *Yeshibah* though he was instructed in the Talmud and other Jewish studies privately, and he never had to struggle for enlightenment, as his father, Simon, a timber merchant, was himself one of the intellectuals with a rather sceptical attitude toward religion. In fact, Bershadski, though he loved the Hebrew language, did not

possess that deep-seated attachment for Judaism, its spirit, and its heritage which we have noted in other writers, and he thus represents the younger generation who had emancipated themselves to a great extent from tradition, though they remained conscious Jews. Their emancipation differs from the one sought by the *Maskilim* of the former generation, for while the latter made every step towards liberation from tradition with great difficulty and after severe inner conflict, the former had no qualms of conscience in living a free life and took it as a natural state of affairs.

Bershadski was endowed by nature with both an analytical and logical mind which seized eagerly upon the paradoxes and contradictions in life, and in addition with a cold and unemotional nature. He thus remained, in a period when Jewish life was a turmoil of movements and tendencies, unaffected by them all and judged them rather objectively, by the standards of cold logic. This indifference and scepticism was augmented by the influence of the realistic Russian literature of which he was both a voracious reader and a conscious imitator. Added to this there were the experiences of his life. Being of an independent character and one who was eager to taste the joys of life without restraint, he would have found more satisfaction either in the career of a rich merchant or in the free professions, but he was unfitted for the first on account of his sincerity and excessive pride and could never attain the second because of lack of preparation. The result was that he became a teacher of Hebrew, which occupation, though it became secularized among the Jews in the nineties of the last century, nonetheless restrained his independence to a certain degree and also limited his enjoyment of life. The situation irked him very much, especially the modicum of hypocrisy which was forced upon him by his profession and caused him to display in his writings the paradoxes, inconsistencies, and the less attractive aspects in the Jewish life of his day.

Bershadski possessed, besides logical analysis and descriptive ability, also psychological insight, and he knew well the life he described in its inner as well as its outer aspects. Because of these qualities he was able to produce the first two realistic novels in modern Hebrew literature in which not only is that cross-section of life he describes—that of the large city—well portrayed, but the characters appear not as types as in the novels of the Haskalah but as individuals whose thoughts, feelings, and sentiments are skilfully analyzed.

Our author was, as said, a disciple of the Russian realistic writers and his novels bear the evidence of a carefully laid-out plan. There is a fairly well-connected sequence in the plot and few sudden turns. The plots themselves, however, are limited in scope and the story could be told in much less space than it occupies, but the lack of action is made up by the discussions on the problems of the day and on the relation between the sexes and their attitude towards each other. His first novel entitled *be-Ein Matarah* (Without a Purpose) was published in 1899. It has as its subtitle, *A Novel of the Life of the Middle Class*. In reality, most of the characters are Hebrew teachers, some of the older type of *Melamdin*, but the majority of the modern type, who constitute a part of the modernized Jewish middle class. There are only few, and these rather of minor importance, representatives of the mercantile class. Most of the characters, including the women, belong to the Intelligentsia and loquaciously discuss the problems of the day and the movements which had recently made their appearance in Jewish life, such as nationalism and the revival of Hebrew. The principal character, Adamowitz, a young man of twenty-five, a teacher of Hebrew, is handsome, learned, a good pedagogue, and a good debator, distinguished for his logical analysis and scepticism. Had Adamowitz been less sceptical and had he had a definite view of life, he might have been happy in his little circle, but his lack of ideals, his inborn cynicism which came as a result of destructive criticism, and above all, his occupation, make him dissatisfied with himself and the society around him. Still, because of his physical and intellectual qualities, he is lionized in his circle, especially by the women. This flatters his egoism, and though as an aesthete, he looks with contempt upon the members of his group who are inferior to him intellectually, still he associates with them. Yet there are moments when he feels the emptiness of life, and this emptiness he endeavors to fill with search after pleasures. He has illicit relations with a young married woman, Miriam Shulbaum, whose husband had emigrated to the United States; this, however, is an easy conquest and he sets out to find more daring adventures. He succeeds in exerting his influence upon a young woman of his acquaintance who yields to his wishes. He has no moral qualms, for he is primarily moved by the desire of conquest, but he is also moved by a sense of pity and by fear of consequences. His fears are realized, and Adamowitz's egoism is jolted by the lashing he receives from the deceived girl's brother. The girl leaves the town

and he again feels an emptiness in life. This incident, however, arouses in him a more genuine feeling towards another young lady, Bertha Moranz, who struggles with herself against her love for him. Even his character and his latest action, which became known, does not chill her love. The author marks a fine psychological trait. Bertha, though of fine character, is not shocked by Adamowitz's action, but worries lest he loved the girl and she was thus for a time her rival. Adamowitz realizes that he also loves Bertha and tells her so, assuring her that he has loved her for a long time, but that his pride had prevented him from acknowledging it. He, however, knowing his own selfish nature, explains to the girl that it would be wrong for them to marry for his extreme egoism would prevent their happiness. He thus remains again without any purpose in life. Moreover, the author implies that he is doomed to life-long frustration for even to die fittingly, that is aesthetically, is impossible without possessing a purpose.

Bershadski is objective and does not pass judgment upon Adamowitz. Although he incorporates in the portrait of his character many of his own traits, yet it is evident that he does not approve of him, and while he does not seek to moralize, the conclusion that one should have an ideal in life would be a legitimate inference. Adamowitz is an individual; still there were many like him among the Intelligentsia of the middle class and he is true to life. Drawn from life are also the other characters, especially several of the women whose secret tragedies arouse our sympathy. There is, as said, a connected sequence in the novel but not artful unity, for there are many unnecessary characters and scenes, the omission of which would not in any way have disturbed the process of the story. As a whole, though, Bershadski's first novel revealed to the reader certain phases of the changed Jewish life and presented him with new types of characters hitherto unknown in Hebrew literature. And hitherto unknown were also his precise style, the detailed description of externals, as well as of the internal state of the soul.

Bershadski's second novel, *Neged ha-Zerem* (Upstream), published two years later, again deals with the life of the middle class and aims especially to delineate the changes which entered into that life through the spirit of the times and the futility of all endeavors to stem the tide. In this story, most of the characters are drawn from the mercantile class, but a number also represent the Intelligentsia. The principal character is a middle-aged man, a well to do merchant, Isaac Israelson.

He has received a good Jewish education, is deeply religious but is also modern, well read, and quite aware of the changes in life. He views with alarm the defection of the younger generation from the traditions of their fathers, but believes that it is possible to harmonize religion with modern conditions. All that is necessary, in his opinion, is to forego some religious severities, be tolerant, but to simultaneously insist on observance and belief in the principles of Judaism. In other words, Israelson is an intelligent orthodox Jew who not only believes in the value of Judaism and its harmonization with modern life, but undertakes to carry through his ideas in the circle of his own family. His house is conducted both in accordance with Jewish tradition and the manners and customs of modern life. He hopes his children will be different from those of his friends and relatives, whose conduct and religious attitude he greatly deprecates.

His hopes, however, are doomed to disappointment. The currents of irreligiosity, materialism, and love of pleasure which swept many of the younger generation of Jews do not pass his children by. They find the atmosphere of the house too austere and they are attracted by the worldly life of their friends. He discovers that his son Joseph has been ensnared by a clerk in his own business to taste the pleasures of sin early in life. This discovery shocks Israelson greatly; he would have condoned irreligiosity, heresy arising from doubt, but animalism, following of mere passion, that is unbearable. He then begins to doubt his own belief in a possible ideal harmony between Judaism and modern life, and comes to the conclusion that such harmony is only possible in Palestine where the Jews, as the naïve nationalists thought at the time, would occupy themselves with agriculture and live a simple life. As a result he becomes an ardent *Hobeb Zion* and makes preparations to settle in *Erez Yisrael*. His next task is to choose a husband for his daughter, Leah, and he selects a young man, Hayyim Solomon Rosenberg, who is a religious idealist and an ardent nationalist. Leah at first consents to the choice and becomes engaged to the young man, but her friends declare him unfit for proper society, by which is meant the hilarious, pleasure-loving group of young men and women, and influenced by them, she breaks the engagement. The father is then compelled to marry her to his brother-in-law, Solomon Weltman, a leading member of the "proper" society. Thus one by one his hopes fade and Israelson comes to the conclusion that it is difficult to sail upstream and acknowledges himself defeated. The characters, Israel-

son as well as the others, are well drawn and we also obtain a fair picture of the life of the younger generation of the middle class. However, we also meet among them some of a serious frame of mind who reflect upon life in an earnest manner, but, as in the first novel of our author, they are infected by scepticism, and consequently have no definite constructive view of life. Such a character is Michael Saperstein, a bookkeeper in a bank, well-learned and endowed with an analytical mind; he sees the incongruity in the current movements but is unable to offer any ideal of his own. This novel, like the first, reflects Bershadski's own views; which were of a negative rather than of a positive character. Consequently, we miss in his novels the idealistic side of the young people which was greatly in evidence at the time as testified by the sacrifices of numerous young men and young women who were the leaders of both the nationalistic and socialistic movements. Nonetheless even our author's novels represent a fair section of Jewish life in Russia.

His technique in the second novel is much improved. There is greater coherence in the sequence of events and more coördination, but even here there are some characters who bear little relation to the central theme of the story and are brought in mainly for effect in order to make the plot more complicated. In general, the novels of Bershadshi are a fair attempt to draw a picture of contemporary life on a large scale, and as such constitute a landmark in Hebrew literature which, since the end of the Haskalah period, had expressed itself mainly in sketches and short stories.

Bershadski also wrote a number of short stories and sketches. These are distinguished by the same characteristics as his novels. They depict episodes of contemporary life, and are realistic and display psychological penetration. In a way they excel the novels, inasmuch as the sketches cover a wider range than the former. They are not limited to the middle class, the characters being drawn from all strata of society. The pessimistic attitude towards life is greatly reflected in them and consequently they depict mainly tragic episodes. There is also an echo of the inequality between the classes, the wrongs committed by the rich against the poor, and the resultant suffering of the latter. Even the participation of the young Jews in the revolutionary movement and the pogroms find a place in these stories. The suffering of the poor at the hands of the rich are vividly expressed in such brief sketches as the *ha-Lewayah* (The Funeral) and *Hinah et Ruho* (Satisfaction). The

theme of both is the betrayal of the daughters of the poor by rich young men. In the first we are introduced to the sorrowful cortege of the father of the betrayed whose death was hastened by the disgrace cast upon the family. The girl follows the coffin gloomily enough, but few sympathize with her, while at the same time none seem to condemn her betrayer who passes the cortege in his luxuriant carriage. His nonchalance to the whole affair is described in a few chosen words. In the second story we are told of the rebellion of the wronged against the perpetrators of the evil. Barsuzki, the blacksmith, suspects the young and rich Kronstein of molesting his betrothed, Frieda Reisha, who serves as cook in his father's house. He meets the swain and assaults him out of a desire for revenge. Barsuzki is brought to court, confesses his guilt, and receives his punishment cheerfully, for he had had the satisfaction of making the offender feel that even the honor of servants cannot be violated with impunity.

Several other stories deal with disappointment in love, with particular attention to its effect upon the mental state of the sufferer. Some sketches picture with great penetration the pangs of the soul of one who is forced to commit a crime through necessity. Such is the sketch, *ha-Pa'am ha-Rishonah* (The First Time), where a mother steals some food in order to still the hunger of her children. Of a similar nature is the sketch, *Nodah ha-Dabar* (The Thing Became Known). In it there is revealed the state of mind of a respectable member of a Jewish community in a small town who, through force of circumstances, became a beggar in a large city whither he went to seek employment. The first time, he stretched forth his hand involuntarily for a donation when he was weakened by hunger, but slowly, after the first pangs of shame passed, he became a professional beggar. Yet he preserved his dignity, for he concealed the fact from his family at home. On his way to his home town, his fear was lest it become known in the town. When he reached his home and found that his family and townspeople were unaware of the fact, he blessed his stars and momentarily enjoyed his former standing in the community, but not for very long. The fact became known and his suffering began. The sufferings and struggles of a fine aesthetic Jewish intellectual who joins the revolutionary movement and is compelled to commit acts contrary to his nature are vividly described in the sketch, *Neshamah Intelligentit*. He believes in revolution, but his artistic sense, his former mode of living, and his educational training cause him to shrink from the un-

couth manners of his companions, laborers recruited from the slums. In spite of his belief in democracy, his aristocratic past separates him from them, despite his attempt to suppress a feeling of revulsion. He also values life too much and abhors terrorism, and when he himself, compelled by the jeers of his companions, commits involuntarily a terroristic act, he is haunted by the vision of the murdered official and suffers pangs of remorse. Thus in a number of stories, Bershadski presents us with glimpses of the variegated life of his day, and illuminates them with his psychological analysis and with his insight into the souls of his characters.

Our writer's strict realism and love of detailed description compelled him to abandon the euphuistic and somewhat ornate style of many of the Hebrew writers of the day and choose one of precision and accuracy. At times it sounds even dry and approaches that of an official report, but what it loses in beauty, pliability, and elasticity, it gains in clearness and lucidity. Bershadski exerted great influence upon the younger writers of the day who imitated him, unconsciously or consciously, both in technique of writing and in style.

14. JOSEPH HAYYIM BRENNER

The realism introduced by Ben Avigdor and his followers soon found stronger expression in the stories and novels of a group of younger writers who began to appear at the end of the last century. The most prolific and potentially the ablest of them was Joseph Hayyim Brenner (1881-1921). The life of Brenner, while not distinguished by any exceptional events, was a checkered one. Born to poverty and suffering, his early youth spent in a typically small Jewish town, he later studied successively in several *Yeshivot* in various towns where he experienced the tribulations, bitterness, and insults attendant upon the life of a *Yeshibah Bahur* in those days. From the *Yeshibah* he graduated into that hurly-burly world of Jewish secular students or "externes" as they were called then (an externe was a student who, barred from entering the gymnasium, studied privately and prepared himself for examinations). This world was a tragic one, reflecting the tragedy of young men and women who, having emancipated themselves from the traditions of religion and their past, were on the whole maladjusted to the new conditions of life. They strove towards something different but that "something" was never clear to them. In the minds of these students there reigned confusion of ideas and

ideals gathered from the Russian literature of the time and augmented by the influence of the movements prevalent in Russian and particularly in Jewish life. They were greatly attracted by the various factions of socialists, and many of them participated in the activities of the *Bund* (Sec. 2) or other socialist parties. Some, however, because of their past life and education, rebelled against the anti-Jewish tendencies of these activities and became followers of the Zionist movement in its various shades and forms. Brenner was affected by all the intellectual currents and movements of this world and reacted to them in his own way. For a time he was swayed by the ideology of the *Bund* and participated in all forms of illegal propaganda among the masses, even to the editing of one of the party journals for which activities he was arrested. His Jewishness and love for the Hebrew language and its literature caused him, however, to rebel against the extreme tendencies of the movement and gravitate toward Zionism, though he found little satisfaction even in that movement. After serving for a year or so in the army, the life of which he portrayed later in one of his sketches, he went to London where for a few years he worked as compositor in a printing-shop, and as an avocation or rather vocation he edited and published a Hebrew monthly entitled *ha-Meorer* (The Crier). He then went back to Russia, sojourning in various cities, whence he crossed into Galicia where he made several attempts at publishing short-lived Hebrew magazines. In 1910 he finally settled in Palestine and became a leader of the pre-War labor and pioneer groups, remaining there through the War years and suffering all the hardships entailed by it. He lived to see the dawn of a new life in that land, but found a tragic death in the riots in Jaffa in the year 1921 when he was cut down by the ruthless hand of an Arab in the forty-first year of his life. He thus illustrated in his own life the words put into the mouths of one of his heroes who said of himself and his friends—these constituted a large part of the Russian Jewish youth of those days—"We had no stability in life and in the world in which we moved; we and all with us wandered from place to place, from language to language, from culture to culture."

However, the mere physical events in Brenner's life do not entirely explain his literary creations. He was not the only Hebrew writer who was born and bred in poverty, nor the only literary wanderer. The key to his peculiar type of writing and to the eccentric heroes he presents lies in his own character and psychosis. Brenner was one of

many young men who were torn from their moorings and could find no anchor. He had lost his faith in tradition but had not found, like so many others, a substitute in nationalism or cosmopolitanism. Endowed by nature with a feeling heart, he saw all the evil in life, especially in Jewish life, the grim poverty, suffering, and persecution, and his heart contracted with pain and commiseration for the unfortunate. The fact that he was weak and unable to alleviate that misery even to the smallest degree only increased that pain and deepened his pessimism. But he also possessed a keen analytical mind, a great, excessive and unhealthy quality of penetration into the depths of things which revealed to him the hollowness of many ideas, slogans, and movements in spite of their apparent exaltedness. He thus often saw the negative side of things rather than their positive aspect. It is therefore small wonder that he found no satisfaction in the movements which milled in and without the ghetto and deafened the ears with their loud cries. His sympathies, as mentioned, brought him close to the socialistic movement which promised a cure for all evils and offered a panacea to all human ills, but his sceptical and analytical mind saw the defects in this much heralded cure-all, and his observant eye discerned the pettiness, ludicrousness, and egoism in the life of the followers of that movement in the ghetto. He even noticed the condescending attitude of the fraternizing Gentile socialists towards their Jewish comrades which concealed a hidden antipathy to them. Nor could he be satisfied with the Zionist ideal, for here again his character, full of contradictions, stood in the way. He had emancipated himself from Jewish tradition, but not from Jewishness. His love for Hebrew and even for Jewish nationalism was still strong, but equally strong was his humanism. Thus the struggle between humanism and nationalism went on in his soul and was augmented by the conflict between the social and the individualistic aspects of his personality. He was endowed both with a keen individualism and a strong attraction for his people and interest in its fate. He swayed, therefore, between the two. He remained thus with his contradictions and problems which he faced both as a man and as a Jew, without clear or definite ideals, knowing only that things ought to be changed, and that one must protest against these evils, even though that protest will not be heard. It was only towards the end of his life that Brenner found a goal for his striving and efforts. This rather negative but distinct character of Brenner is completely reflected in his sketches and

novels, especially in the latter, for his heroes are practically duplicates of himself, and his novels are to a very great extent autobiographical.

As a writer, Brenner possesses great qualities and also grave defects. He is endowed with a power of description, enabling him to give the minutest details of both the appearance of his characters and situations, is a good observer whom little escapes, and in his drawing of episodes and in his satiric remarks he often reminds one of Mendele Moker Seforim. In addition, he possesses psychological insight and penetrates to the depths of the human soul. These qualities would have made our author a great novelist were he of a less sanguine and stormy character, but he was not and hence his shortcomings. He lacks entirely artistic detachment and objectivity. He is rather excessively impressionistic and his novels are primarily a record of impressions of the moment and have very little plot. And though there are, as a rule, a multitude of scenes and a large number of characters, the events and episodes are few, as the scenes are repeated descriptions of similar states of the soul of the principal character. The novels are also filled with irrelevant details which interrupt the progress of the story and are overweighted with monologues, semi-philosophical remarks on life and its problems, literary questions, and similar matters. All these interrupt the unity of the stories and give them the character of a series of episodes. In addition, they end abruptly and often in the very midst of things. Brenner lacked proportion, plan, and possibly even imagination, and hence the inartistic form of his novels. He also, it appears, lacked interest in nature as we do not find a single description of nature in his numerous writings. His intense interest was in life and human suffering; nothing else concerned him. He was a disciple of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Gorky, but only learned from them how to apply the scalpel to the human soul and absorbed some of their pessimism and negative attitude towards society and its life. Yet his writings possess an interest on account of their reality and deep penetration in the varied situations of life.

The belletristic writings of Brenner may be divided into two groups, a number of sketches and short stories written mainly in the early period of his literary activity and the novels written later. The novels may again be divided into those which portray the life of his group in Russia; those which deal with the London ghetto; and those which picture the life and struggles of the pre-War Jewish settlement in Palestine. In his short stories Brenner is primarily the artist and the

observer of life, and from this point of view, the sketches excel the novels. The first collection of his stories was published in 1898 under the name *me-Emek 'Aḳhor* (Out of the Valley of Tribulation)—a name characteristic of the content of all of his short stories. The world and life pictured in them have no other quality but that of suffering and misery. Many were the Hebrew writers who attempted to introduce us to the life of the poor ghetto Jews, to the world where struggle for existence was fierce and bitter, where the word *Parnasah* was the most important one in the vocabulary of its inhabitants; but none pictured this world in as dark an aspect and in as black a color as Brenner. In his series of portrayals of that life there is not even one ray of light nor one sound of laughter. His characters in the *Valley of Tribulation* do not know how to laugh for their life is a continuous and unsuccessful struggle to escape starvation, cold, and sickness. It is the vale of tears, shed or unshed, of disappointment, of lost hopes, of deeds performed against one's will in order to assuage, even temporarily, the pangs of suffering and oppression. The tragedies are petty affairs, yet as far as the characters are concerned, they blast their lives. In the sketch, *Pat Leḥem* (A Piece of Bread), the story is told of a Jew who lost his position as clerk in a liquor store on account of the liquor laws, and, reduced to abject poverty, is about to pawn his *Talit* and *Tefillin* (prayer shawl and phylacteries) in order to call a physician for his sick wife. As he is about to take them from the synagogue he notices a half loaf of bread lying near the Holy Ark and he steals it to still the hunger of his children. Coming home and carrying the "thing," as he calls it, in his hands, he finds his wife dying and the "thing" falls on the muddy floor. In another, a poor seamstress who supports her family works late at night to complete a dress for the daughter of the rich Jew of the town, Marcus Signazer. The work is interrupted by the cries of the baby in the crib. The distracted mother in anger and in anguish strikes the infant and the blow kills the child. While this takes place in the hut of the poor seamstress, song and dance go on in the spacious home of the rich Signazer, and the elegant young lady waits impatiently for her new dress and pours out her complaints at the dishonest seamstress before her brother, the university student. He comforts her by saying that unfortunately the masses lack a sense of morality and are unreliable.

Involuntarily we are moved by the strange act of Ḥayyim Mati, the watchman, who for years had faithfully guarded the offices and houses

of the rich Grossman, and suddenly one fine morning raised his heavy stick and shattered the windows in the office of his employer. This dull and slow-witted night watchman had noticed that his daughter-in-law, who served in the house of the rich Jew while her husband served in the army of the Czar, was being too well treated by the young son of her master who frequently presented her with trinkets and he began to suspect her. He tried to talk to her but she either remained silent or laughed. Something led him to rebel against fate, against his employer, and this rebellion, this incomprehensible anger expressed itself in the smashing of the windows. The clang of the falling glass quieted, for a time, the pain gnawing at his heart.

Thus in a series of portraits there pass before us the trials and woes of men, women, and children depicted in an objective, skilful way. Realist that Brenner was, he did not hesitate to picture the life he knew in all its nakedness and ugliness, for eroticism and sex complexes were not absent in that life. Most of the sketches deal with the poor ghetto life in Russia, but some, dating from the period of Brenner's sojourn in London, deal with the life of the Jewish immigrants in Whitechapel. The pictures are not much brighter, for the period of adaptation of these immigrants was a long struggle with poverty and misery. There is in them, however, a note of irony and satire. Our author, though full of anger against, and contempt for, the rich and the self-satisfied English Jews, the owners of the sweat-shops where the immigrants were exploited, did not fail to notice the pettiness and ludicrousness of the early socialist movement among the proletarians in London. The excessive enthusiasm of the leaders of the movement, their admiration for everything Russian, and their general maladjustment to the conditions of the country wherein they resided aroused in him a kind of repulsion to these heroes whose power consisted mainly in flamboyant speeches about the coming revolution, while in reality they were helpless and lost in their new environment.

To these stories, which bear the stamp of objectivity belongs also a long biographical story entitled, *Shanah Ahat* (One Year). It is primarily a precise and minute record of events in the life of a Jewish soldier during a year of service in the Russian army. Brenner displays much art in the portrayal and also keen penetration into the attitudes and motivations of the officers and soldiers.

In his longer stories and novels, Brenner ceases to be objective and becomes subjective. In reality these productions can be called neither

stories nor novels, for as said, they have little plot or a connected series of events. They are mainly a series of monologues, remarks, and aphorisms of a semi-philosophic nature containing reflections on life, its purpose, or rather purposelessness, the pain of suffering and evil in the world, interspersed with some events and episodes of a petty nature and intertwined with realistic portraits of the environment in which the principal characters move. It is impossible and also unnecessary to discuss the content of these novels, for it is reduced to a minimum, nor do the novels differ from one another in reality, as the situation in all is the same with only slight variations, mainly a change in location. Likewise do the principal characters in all the novels represent one type, the same man under slightly different circumstances and aspects.

Almost all his heroes were formerly students of the *Yeshibah* whose childhood was spent in misery and poverty and under a discipline of rigorous piety. They broke away from that world and strove to a fuller life, but due to their weak will, pessimism, scepticism, and negative analysis of men and ideas, they find no satisfaction in anything and remain without attachment to any place, person, or idea. There is, however, one thing which still possesses some interest for them, and that is Hebrew literature, as most of them are incipient writers, but their negative attitude toward things and their destructive criticism ultimately sweep away even this weak anchor of safety, and they remain, so to say, Jewish hobos of a peculiar character.

Brenner's hobos differ from those portrayed by Dostoyevsky and Gorky whom he took as models. They are not morally low and do not revenge themselves upon society by committing crimes as those portrayed by the former, nor are they happy-go-lucky, indifferent to their lot, or malicious rebels as the types of the latter. The Jewish hobos are respectable, quiet, and innocent creatures and are not indifferent to their fate. On the other hand, they whine, protest, and lacerate others and themselves. Their protest is expressed primarily in words intended to uncover the sham in life and in various states of society. There is much truth in their satiric remarks, and this is probably the most valuable side of our author's productions, but nothing positive. They speak repeatedly of death and suicide, yet none of them actually commits the act. They live on in spite of their denunciations of life. Perhaps there is in this clinging to life under all circumstances a trait of the Jewish character. Their rebellion and malicious-

ness is expressed against Judaism and Jewish nationalism. No phase of it finds favor in the eyes of these spiritual hobos, especially the belief that the Jews are a chosen people. All this is a reflection of Brenner's own state of mind during most of his life. Only in the later period does that maliciousness abate and positive views begin to appear.

Let us cast a brief glance at the metamorphoses of the hero in Brenner's novels. His first revelation is that of Fireman in the story, *ba-Horef* (In the Winter)—a symbolic name as all his titles and many place names in his stories are. Fireman studied in *Yeshivot*, suffered hunger and wandered from place to place. He finally goes to the large city, becomes an "externe," with a view of preparing himself for examinations at the gymnasium, but he never attains his aim, for his negative criticism reveals to him the purposelessness of such work. He begins to drift, mingles in the society of Jewish young men and women, students like himself, who are apparently deeply interested in socialism and radicalism. Fireman, though, remains indifferent because of his scepticism and uncanny insight into the reality of things which reveals to him the hollowness of this apparent idealism. He is also diverted from the movement by his Jewishness which draws him towards the national ideal, but which likewise proves unsatisfactory. He then returns for a short time to his home, but leaves again not knowing whither. The story ends with the scene when Fireman is put off the train because he has no ticket and is thus left in the middle of the road. Winter came too early in the life of Fireman, the withering cold of purposelessness.

The same character is revealed to us again under the name of Abramson in the second novel, *me-Sabib le-Nekudah* (Around the Point). Abramson had the same education as Fireman and his life moves in the very same circles but there is a certain difference. He, unlike Fireman, has an aim in life. He strives to become a Hebrew writer and publishes one or two articles. For a time he is even an enthusiastic Zionist. But all this does not last long; the materialistic-idealistic circle, an incipient love for a girl together with his withering criticism destroy that ideal for him and he is disappointed. The indifference of the Jews to the Zionist ideal, the paucity of Hebrew writers, increase his pessimism, the goal of his striving disappears and he becomes apathetic like Fireman. He, however, still loves his people and protests bitterly against his friends who talk about saving humanity at a time when their own brethren are persecuted. He becomes tempo-

rarily insane when he hears of a pogrom in a near-by city and of the suicide of his friend, Davidowsky. This is the concluding scene of the novel. Abramson is a more positive type than Fireman, and though his striving was thwarted there is a possibility that he may find a new point of support in life.

In the third novel entitled *me-Eber le-Gebulin* (Beyond the Border), we find again the same hero, this time called Yoḥanan, in a somewhat different environment in Whitechapel, London. Yoḥanan went through the same experiences as Abramson, became a Hebrew writer, dreamt of great creations in that language, but coming to London after his escape from a Russian prison and settling in the ghetto, the life of which at the time was not only petty but repulsive, and seeing the gross materialism of the immigrants and the grotesque socialist movement among the proletarians, he despairs, and like the others, loses his moorings in life. He exclaims with Abramson and the other heroes, "The Jews are not able to accomplish things, and while every individual Jew has all the qualities and defects of a human being, the people as a whole are more like gypsies."¹ He becomes a writer in a radical Yiddish weekly which work is distasteful to him. This increases his pessimism and he talks of suicide, but he lives on. The story ends, like all other novels, with a soliloquy of Yoḥanan wherein he tries to express some thoughts about the attainment of a certain state in life which is an amalgam of pessimism, indifference, and resigned submission to fate.

To the same period belongs a series of impressions entitled *Min ha-Mezar* (Out of the Straits) which gives a gloomy picture of the London ghetto life, especially that of the immigrants. In this series Brenner creates for the first time a positive type of a Jewish hero, Menuḥin. He is a former revolutionary who had escaped from Siberia and ultimately evolved for himself a peculiar view of life, a kind of fatalism. He does not protest nor does he rebel but accepts his misery with resignation. He is merciful, for even while he has no coat to his back he adopts a waif, the illegitimate child of a girl of the ghetto, and shares with him his last morsel. He is not worried about death, for though his life is one round of suffering, he finds comfort in the good he accomplishes.

In all these novels there is little action on the part of the principal characters; there is much realistic description of group life and a

¹ *Kol Kitbê Brenner* (Collected Works), Vol. II, p. 156.

multitude of irrelevant but interesting scenes. This is especially true of the London stories in which we have a complete picture of the ghetto life in the first decade of the present century. The gloomy picture is due, in part, to the author's pronounced bias, but there is much truth in it. It is interesting to note that the most positive and ideal characters in Brenner's stories are men of the older generation, men of faith and piety, but the author refuses to emphasize that idealism.

With the settlement of Brenner in Palestine about the year 1910, his literary scene is carried over to that land, but there is little change in its nature. It is the same gloomy world of men, maladjusted to life, and the principal characters are the same drifters who look for an anchor in the stormy sea of life. The Palestine of those days was of an entirely different character from the one of the twenties. Life then did not possess the poetic glamor of pioneer days—a life of hope and idealism—nor did the new settlements then have the financial support of the Jews of the Diaspora which the later settlers enjoyed. It was rather a life of struggle, of difficulties to be surmounted, and obstacles to be overcome. The colonies had just been emancipated from the tutelage of Baron Rothschild and his administrators, and the settlers had been left to work out their own salvation and economic security. The groups of young Jews who represented the first wave of pioneers, most of whom had come from Russia where they were inoculated with radicalism and with a colorless idealism, found instead of a welcome reception on the part of the older settlers aloofness and even resentment and animosity. The latter preferred the cheap labor of the Arabs to the more costly and inexperienced work of the pioneers. The result was disappointment and confusion. Added to this there was in evidence the old type of life in Jerusalem where the *Halukkah* still held sway,² and a number of Jews, leaders of institutions, still waxed fat on the spoils of an ill-devised system of charity from which the poor received only a pittance.

It is no wonder that a world of this type could not satisfy Brenner and that he with his deep-seated pessimism saw only its ills and hardly

² The *Halukkah*, literally distribution, was the name of the stipend granted to the settlers in Jerusalem from money collected in various lands of the Diaspora. The fund was known as that of *Meir Ba'al Nes* (Meir the Miracle Worker). Boxes were placed in almost every Jewish home, and the housewives threw their pennies there every Friday. The money was collected in each land or province by agents, and sent to Jerusalem in charge of representatives of that land or province. The office of each division of that Fund was called a *Kolel*, and named after the land it represented.

noticed the few healthy seeds which had already begun to take root even at that time in the apparently barren soil, and he voiced his opinions through his heroes. The principal character of his Palestinian novel, *mi-Kaan u-mi-Kaan* (From Here and There), is Obed Ozer, a fourth incarnation of his first hero Fireman, and his pessimism is only one shade deeper. He comes, like many of the lost idealists, to Palestine to find some content in life, but finds none. In his chagrin he pours his bitter sarcasm on all, on the pioneers, on the colonists, and especially on the Zionists who dream of a Jewish people and a Jewish land. In moments of despair he repeats with venom the scepticism of the former heroes of the value of the great Jewish heritage and ridicules the belief of the Jews that they are a chosen people. He is repelled by the loquaciousness of the Zionists which has only resulted in paucity of action and delivers long tirades against them.

There is no doubt that in these expressions of the negative attitude the author only wanted to arouse the young idealists of the time to more positive activity, but unfortunately he submits no plan of action of his own. Yet an incipient solution seems to be outlined in these stray notes which are called a novel. Side by side with the negative character of Obed Ozer there is a positive one, Aryé Lapidot. He is an old Maskil, a former government Rabbi⁸ who had left Russia to settle in Palestine. Being unable to find a position he becomes a laborer and finds great satisfaction in his work. Life is hard, work is scarce; other tribulations, such as the murder of his son by an Arab add to his cup of sorrow, yet he accepts his lot cheerfully. This Lapidot is probably a prototype of A. D. Gordon who later became the ideal of the pioneers and the propounder of the *Dat ha-Abodah* (Religion and Labor). This novel ends with a scene where Lapidot and his young grandson, Amrom, collect thorns in order to kindle a fire for the baking of the weekly portion of bread, and with the following significant words, "They—the old man and the child—crowned with thorns, both stood at the watch of life. The sun shone, life was thorny, and yet the account was not completed." Brenner seemed to have found a way out of the world of pessimism—work, the tilling of the soil and struggle for the continuation of life.

A more optimistic note is also seen in the other Palestinian novel, *ben-Mayyim le-Mayyim* (Between the Waters). This novel possesses a fair sequence of events and contains less soliloquizing and more

⁸ For the nature of the government Rabbi see Vol. III, p. 251. Note.

action. The hero, Saul, is of a more stable character than the preceding ones. He is still an individualist and has great contempt for the Zionists who speak of the good of the nation, yet he finds interest in his work as a teacher in the schools and in the raising of a new generation. This, however, does not continue; disappointment in love arouses the pessimism of the individualist and he remains without purpose in life. But the positive view of life is expressed here, as in the former novel, by a secondary character, Aaron, the brother of Saul. He believes in Palestine as a personal necessity, and declares that there life has to begin anew, and that people must be builders and creators. When some of the younger intellectuals express their scepticism of the work in Palestine and speak of returning to Europe, Aaron exclaims vehemently, "But I need a fatherland, and here is my fatherland." Thus, a new need arose which many of the young Jews of the first decade of the century hardly felt.

The last novel of Brenner, *Shekol we-Kisholon* (Loss and Stumbling), deals, like its predecessor, with life in Palestine before the War, but does not continue the optimistic note which had made its appearance in the previous works. Its hero, Ezekiel Hefez, is of the standard Brennerian type, a man sick in body and soul, a wanderer who had visited all the capitals of Europe, and finally came to Palestine as a pioneer. He worked for a time in a *Kevuzah* but suffering an attack of insanity he was taken to Jerusalem to an asylum where he spent six months, and on leaving the place remained in the city in the house of his uncle, a poor *Maskil*. There he was entangled in a love affair with his cousin, Esther, a spinster, who longed to bestow her affection on someone, though she knew that the object of her love is sick in body and soul. Ezekiel, however, loved the younger sister, Miriam, who in her turn loved some one else. The result is tragedy and suffering on all sides. The environment is that of Old Jerusalem, with its poverty, beggary, struggle of the poor, and mismanagement of public funds on the part of the leaders and officers. There is little new in the character of Hefez. Like the others, he philosophizes upon life, deploras its vanity and hollowness, its ills and evils; he talks of death, yet clings to life. However, the little that is new is of importance. This consists in a change of emphasis. Brenner is in this novel mainly concerned with the individual and not at all with the life of the nation. The ailing Hefez, in spite of his pessimism, offers repeatedly a defense of the right of the weak to live. In a long soliloquy he reiterates that

the unfortunate, the sick, and the poor can find an interest in life, though that interest be purely egotistic, or as he expresses it briefly, "We, i.e. the down-trodden, the 'havenots' are for ourselves all and everything." In another place he speaks of the joy of mere living and of the happiness one can attain in life under all circumstances. There is also an attempt on the part of Hefez to find contentment in the doing of good, and he champions the right and worth of ethics as against aesthetics. He claims that the pleasures derived from doing good are equal to those we denominate aesthetic, and proclaims that the values of the different satisfactions of human needs are equal, provided the needs are real and emanate from the heart. In this novel then, Brenner, finally having overcome his innate pessimism, shows the way to the solution of the problem of the suffering individual.

The novel excels all others in its artistry. It offers a skilful picture of the multi-colored life of Old Jerusalem, though it is at times shocking in its ugly realism. It also contains a fine psychological analysis of the complex human emotions of the two sisters, Esther and Miriam, cousins of Hefez.

Judging the novels and stories of Brenner as a whole, we can say that, though his scepticism, pessimism, and the gloomy atmosphere pervading them often repel us, and though the character of his heroes is far from attractive, yet the sincerity and earnestness expressed in them have deep interest for us. His attempt to fathom the depths of the mystery of life, though he finds no solution, possesses a fascination for all who are faced by life's realities. His heroes are not the children of pure imagination but are taken from the life of a few decades ago. Such characters abounded among the Jewish youth of Russia as well as in other centers twenty or thirty years ago. We must also not forget the value of the realistic portrayal of Jewish life in the various ghettos of the world. The stories reveal its nuances and phases, good and bad, and serve as a guide for the understanding of events and the process of Jewish history in recent times.

It is to be regretted that the life and character of Brenner prevented him from attaining the calm and objectivity necessary for producing great works of art. He possessed sincerity, earnestness, and power of observation, but he lacked the above-mentioned qualities which would have imparted to his stories the much-wanted perfection and artistic completeness. But parodying the words of Hefez, we might say that

we should be thankful for what this suffering and struggling writer did give us.

15. *THE YOUNGER REALISTS. G. SHUFFMAN AND I. D. BERKOWITZ*

A younger contemporary of Brenner is G. Shuffman. He resembles the former in his realism, and to a great extent, in the selection of similar types of heroes, but differs from him in temperament, technique, and view of life. Brenner's novels, as we have seen, are thoroughly impressed with the subjectivism of the author. His characters deliver long monologues upon the problems of life, the destiny of Judaism, the fate of the Jews, and similar subjects, a device which the writer employed in order to express his opinions on questions with which he had grappled all his life and for which he sought a solution. His heroes are thus philosophers and thinkers more than men of action. The case is different, though, with Shuffman. He is entirely objective and is primarily a photographer or portrayer of certain episodes and events in the life of the individuals he chose to describe. Unlike Brenner, he is not a pessimist nor is he an optimist, for his own view of life is not revealed to us. He does not delve in problems nor does he discuss movements and relations between the individual and society. All social phenomena are out of his sphere of interest for that lies primarily within the bounds of the life of the individual. And even that sphere is greatly limited, for Shuffman is not a novelist. His writing is confined to short stories, the great majority of them consisting of a few pages and some even of less. It is the exotic moments in human life, we might almost say the abnormal, which capture his eye and absorb his interest.

The canvas upon which he draws his pictures closely resembles that of Brenner. The stormy life of the Jewish youth during the decades before the War and years of the War is his theme. He avoids almost entirely the portrayal of the small town ghetto, and when it does enter into his writings in the few sketches which deal with childhood reminiscences, it is wrapped in a romantic halo. Our author was born in a small town in the province of Mohilew in White Russia, and undoubtedly attended the *Heder* and probably the *Yeshibah*. He was later entangled in the illegal activities of the socialist movement, served for a time in the Russian army, and then wandered, in company with

many other refugees, through the cities of Galicia, Austria, and Germany.

On the whole, there is little of the typically Jewish life in his stories. It is primarily that of the young Russian Jew outside of his home environment. There are a number of stories of the life of the soldier, of the prisoner, and primarily of the refugee in the cities of Western Europe.

His principal characters are, like Brenner's, torn from their moorings and set adrift in the world with no particular purpose. Many of them were formerly idealists, members of socialist societies who dreamt of liberty and democracy, but circumstances which made them derelicts upon a stormy sea, refugees in a strange land, swept away the haze of idealism and left them empty of all striving, and they often try to drown their sorrow and misery in erotic indulgence. In general, the erotic moments and their portrayal occupy much space in our writer's sketches. He was greatly influenced by the decadent current in general literature which saw in the naked display of the human passions a glorification of life. The life thus displayed in Shuffman's stories is far from attractive, yet he evinces great skill in its description. His portrayal of the Russian army barrack life, for example, gross as it is, nevertheless holds our interest, and similarly numerous other incidents. Our writer does not philosophize and does not, like Brenner, decry in many pages the evils and ills of life, but in an objective way, in curt remarks and extremely short descriptions of men and their actions, he reveals to us the depth of these evils. A short sketch, describing the finding of the body of a young boy who had committed suicide by hanging, emphasizes briefly but poignantly the various emotions of the men and women of the city at the sight of the tragedy, their dread of death, their race feelings, their superstitions, and the ultimate indifference to the loss of human life. Thus: "Is he a Jew or a Catholic?" This is the first question of every newcomer. "A Jew," is the response, and this causes a cloud to pass over the brow of the Jew, or reversely, the escape of a quiet sigh of relief from the Catholic in the group.

The street women quietly converse with each other. Says one, "The watchman says that when the rope was cut, the body was still warm." "Hunger forced him to commit the act," surmises another. "Do you see the rope? They say that the rope of a suicide brings luck," remarks a third. And when the hearse passes, one shouts to the other, "Where

is the rope?" In this semi-symbolic style lies the artistic strength of Shuffman. He is cryptic, but the few traits he draws of a person, the several lines of description of a situation are pregnant with meaning. The reader feels that each word is a symbol for much that is not expressed. Our writer excels Brenner in description, for he does not limit it to persons but also extends it to things and scenes. He does not dwell much upon the description of nature as such, but the environment is always portrayed, though in a jerky manner, like a series of daubs on a canvas, and yet these incoherent phrases somehow harmonize with the personal situation or the state of the soul of the character and explain it.

His exceptional skill in expressing himself briefly and symbolically enabled Shuffman to compress much in very little. As an example we can cite the following jottings which bear the title *Akshow* (And Now).

"They were the only ones whose eyes were opened to see the evil of the old order of society. Others did not see it just as the fish do not see the river. Justice flashed upon the land like an electric ray. They accomplished their aim temporarily only in one land—no idlers, all work."

"But they, the enlightened, what will they do now? It is indeed hard; they could spend years in prison, work at forced labor in Siberia. But to be occupied at ordinary work eight hours daily, this they cannot do." What stinging irony, aimed at many of the initiators of the new social order in Russia, these words contain.

Shuffman seeks to depict the man in the Jew, but he does not escape the burden of his heritage for here and there it does crop up. This is especially displayed in some of his sketches where the tragedies of the pogroms are touched upon, and in others where the antagonism between the Jew and the outer world is symbolically and cryptically referred to. It is remarkable that this writer who, in his wanderings, adjusted himself to the general life around him more than any other Hebrew writer, still felt the instinctive dread of the invisible hatred of a hostile world, and in his symbolic way expressed it powerfully. His Jewishness is also strongly expressed in several of his sketches portraying his youth. Here Shuffman grows romantic, and the pictures of Jewish life in the somnolent town of his birth are drawn with love and affection.

In Shuffman modern Hebrew literature possesses a great short story

writer. It is only to be regretted that much of his energy was spent in describing the uglier phases of the life of a decadent youth in a certain time and place. However, those writings wherein life is reflected in its nobler, though often tragic aspects, constitute a valuable addition to that literature.

ii. One of the most distinguished and probably the ablest of the group of younger writers is Isaac Dob Berkowitz (1884). Like many of the Hebrew writers, he was born and raised in a typically Jewish town in the Pale of Settlement in Russia where life flowed quietly in its narrow confines, its form set and standardized by a fixed pattern hallowed by age and tradition, and its atmosphere saturated with poverty and misery which was borne patiently and with a kind of dumb resignation by the great majority of the inhabitants of the town. But a time came when the quietude of that life began to be disturbed; the changes of the outside world seeped also into the town; a new generation arose which endeavored to break the narrow confines, and emerge into a wider, brighter, and more beautiful life. Many of them forsook the ways of their fathers and looked with contempt upon the life of poverty in which they were bred, and strove to immerse themselves in the newer world of which they had had a glimpse, either by mingling in the company of the elite of the town, or by migrating to the larger city.

However, their efforts were seldom successful and the children of the poor who constituted the great majority of the Jews of the town were often forced back into their old environment, back into the poverty of their parents' home. At times, even when some of these strugglers reached their aim and broke into the liberal professions which gave them both economic security and social prestige, they were still unhappy for they were maladjusted to their new environment. Their past experiences weighed heavily upon them. The result of these disturbances, struggles, tossings, and beatings against the walls of an enclosing fate are tragedies, often petty tragedies, but sorrowful nevertheless.

It is this world of tragedies, of the deep suffering of the rebels or maladjusted, that Berkowitz portrays in his sketches with skill, psychological insight, pathos, and sympathy. Our author, like his contemporaries, left his home town, sojourned in larger cities, spent some time in the United States, and finally settled in Palestine. But his wanderings did not enlarge his world; the town continued to be his sphere of observation and of his creative activity, and his characters are almost all drawn from this environment. The thirty-four stories,

included in his collection, deal primarily with that particular life, with the exception of a few stories in which he accompanies the characters across the sea and attempts to describe their lives, or rather episodes of their lives, in their new environment. Only in the last year or two did our author endeavor to change his sphere and transfer his creative genius to a new territory and a changed setting, the Palestinian.

The Jewish town with its life of poverty and struggle is then the circumscribed sphere of our author, just as it was the literary scene of Brenner and others. Still, there is a healthy atmosphere pervading his stories; his characters are merely unfortunates who often beat vainly against a fate which is not of their making, and thus arouse our sympathy and interest.

The great quality of Berkowitz lies in his completeness, for while he limits himself to episodes in the lives of his characters, he does not confine himself to the description of these episodes alone, but reveals much of the hinterland or background which brought them into being. It is thus that while he really aims at a certain situation, he indirectly, but quite clearly, reveals to us a great part of the life of his principal characters and also a considerable portion of the society in which they move. For the very same reasons we glimpse more of the life of the town in all its phases than was probably intended. His heroes are, with some exceptions, young men and women, and though it is their rebellion against the environment and their reaction to the life in which they find themselves which the author aims to present, yet the environment against which the rebellion is expressed, the people which take part in it, though of secondary importance, are described with as much minuteness and precision as the principal characters. As a result we have a complete picture of the town and of the leading types of the older generation along with those of the younger. He does not indulge much in nature descriptions, but he excels in this regard, for we find in his sketches many idyllic descriptions of the town on a wintry day, or a quiet summer afternoon, or on a rainy fall morning, and these descriptions are detailed and minute for he strives to completeness.

Surveying the stories of Berkowitz closely, we can say that, on the whole, there are only a few principal motives or themes with which he deals. These are the rebellion of the younger generation, the tragic situation of the older generation arising from conditions which they cannot control, and the general helplessness and suffering of simple, poor people who bear painfully and silently the burden imposed upon

them. The paucity of his themes imparts to his stories a certain monotony and even repetition, but this is partly compensated by his artistic description which introduces variety. The first motive, that of rebellion, is repeated in a number of stories, such as *Ruhot Raot* (Evil Spirits); *Yerokot* (Vegetables); *Pere Adam* (The Uncivilized); *Ben Zokor* (literally male child, but it signifies the celebration before the circumcision of the child), and similar stories. In the first, a young girl, Zlate, who had come in contact with a finer life while working in a millinery establishment where she had met other girls more fortunately situated than she, and had even had a chance at flirtations with young men, intellectuals and students, borne down by the misery and poverty of her home and by her semi-insane father, also becomes insane. In the second, a young girl, a seamstress in the large city, returns to her father's home where she is stifled by the misery prevailing there to such a degree that she is about to drown herself. In the third a youngster who hires himself out as a teacher to a villager in order to alleviate the poverty in his father's home is unable to stand the attitude of his master who looks upon him as his hireling and he leaves his position though he knows that he cannot return penniless to his home. In all these stories, emphasis is laid, as said, upon the environment and the character of the parents as well as on the actions of the "heroes," and thus the tragic pictures are complete. In the fourth story, a tragi-comic situation in a Jewish home is described. The wife of Zalman, the storekeeper, gives birth to her eighth child. The event astounds the older son, Ephraim, a student, who is disgusted with the life at home, and he openly reproaches his father for the event. Zalman becomes wroth at the audacity of his son but is simultaneously apologetic. The situation grows worse, however, when the customary Friday night celebration turns out a failure for the elite of the town do not attend and only a few poor neighbors put in an appearance. The relation between father and son is aggravated and assumes in the final description not only a tragic but also a comic aspect. Such situations were frequent in the town where birth control was unknown.

The motive of rebellion is also dominant in the sketch of *Moshkele Hazir* where the life of a young Jewish convert who had assimilated himself completely with the Gentiles of his home town is described. The cause for his act was rebellion against the squalor and poverty of his home and also against the brutal conduct of his father towards him, because he had even in his youth evinced a strong inclination to gross

materialism. He was lured by the novelty of a life of sensualism, of satiety in the Gentile street, and ultimately remained in it. The change in the life of Moshkele is well drawn.

The maladjustment motive is dealt with in such stories as *Tolush* (Without Roots); *Klé Zekukit* (Glass Ware); *ba-Nekar* (In a Strange Land); and several more. The themes of the first two are exactly similar. The heroes, Winick and Feitelson, are physicians who are respected in the ghetto, but cannot live up to their role. Winick is especially hampered, for he practices in his home town where he is remembered as a poor bare-foot boy and where his poor brother still lives. They try to mingle freely in the upper stratum of the Jewish society who have never known poverty but are frequently dragged down by their past and are unhappy for they hate the poor yet are tied to them by inseparable ties. The third story portrays a certain Zebulun, a pharmacist, who resides in a city outside of the Pale of Settlement and mingles with the Gentiles, immerses himself in socialist activities, and becomes very intimate with a Russian girl, one of the Intelligentsia, his associate in the work of liberation. But on Yom Kippur Day, the strangeness of the whole situation becomes apparent to him, and the "town," its life, and his past, grip him and he asks himself, "What have I, the son of poor Hayyim Quasnik (Seller of Cider), to do with all these Russians and the daughter of a Viatka saloon-keeper?" To assuage his pain, he chants Yom Kippur melodies.

The same maladjustment is carried into several stories of American Jewish life where the characters, men and women of an older generation, are unable to adjust themselves to new situations. They suffer silently and bear the tragic burden of their fate deep within their hearts.

The disturbances in the life of the older generation through new conditions are vividly pictured in the two sketches, *ha-Miktab* (The Letter) and *Neked* (The Grandchild). The theme of both is the same, the birth of a child to an unmarried girl. In the first, the father of the girl, dumbfounded at the event, attempts to write to his daughter in the United States about his misfortune and to ask her to take her sister out of the small town where she has brought shame upon herself and him. Being illiterate, he dictates the letter to a young boy. He hesitates, however, to state the real situation and finally blurts out that the girl broke her leg. In the second story, the girl returns to the home of her widowed mother from the house of the rich man where she

was serving and gives birth to a child. The tragedy is expressed by the author in the title of the story, *The Grandchild*—the first grandchild, an illegitimate child. Very touching too are the sketches portraying small tragedies in the life of simple and poor people, and especially in the life of children. Of these, *Ba'al Simḥah* (Joy) and *Maftir* are fine examples. Moshe Yose rejoices at the fact that his son, Leizer, an externe, passed his examination in the eighth grade of the gymnasium. It is a great event, and filled with joy, he attempts to tell of the feat of his son to the people in the synagogue, but due to his meekness and low social position, nobody seems to pay any attention to him, and the great news remains untold. In the *Maftir*, the disappointment of a youngster who had prepared himself for weeks for his *Bar Mitzvah* but who is unable to recite the *Maftir* because his poor father is outbidden at the sale of that particular portion, is portrayed.

Thus we go through two volumes of the collected stories and in spite of the narrowness and pettiness of the life reflected there and the repetition of themes, we are greatly moved and intensely interested, for whatever is given there is complete and artistically shaped. Not only is the life of the town colorfully portrayed, but even the sting of poverty and misery is somewhat dulled by the underlying sympathy of the author which breaks through his objectivism and the kind humor which pervades his stories and softens the hard lines of the realities described.

The latest production of Berkowitz is a volume entitled *Menahem Mendel be-Ereẓ Yisrael*. It is a work written with a certain tendency, and is designed to criticize and satirize the recent unhealthy economic conditions in Palestine where, due to the large immigration of Jews, there arose an artificial boom in land values and a feverish activity in the erection of buildings began. This activity attracted to Palestine a host of agents and brokers from various lands of the Diaspora who sensed the possibility of inflating prices and doing business with very little or with no money. This kind of business which subsists on imaginary calculations and fantastic hopes was satirized and immortalized by the well-known Yiddish humorist, Shalom Aleikem (Sec. 66) by his creation of the type of Menahem Mendel, the typical Jewish Don Quixote, in the field of commerce. Berkowitz, the son-in-law of Shalom Aleikem and translator of his works into Hebrew, who imbibed the spirit of that humorist, parodied this type and transferred

him to Palestine, and through his mouth he gives a reflection of the city life in Palestine, especially in Tel-Aviv, during the last several years.

The work consists of a series of letters written by Menaḥem Mendel to his wife in Brownsville, a part of Brooklyn, thickly settled by Jews—the original satire of Shalom Aleikem was written in the same form. The book, though it contains little of a belletristic nature and bears the character of a collection of feuilletons, is yet stamped with artistic quality. The author displays deep power of observation and a keen sense of humor and irony. He is especially severe with certain types of American Jews who, during the years of plenty in this country, reaped a rich harvest in the real-estate business and who, when the depression came, hastened to Palestine in the hope of retrieving their fortunes through speculation, entirely overlooking the ideal phase of the rebuilding of the land. As a whole, the book presents a slightly colored but fair reflection of the life in Tel-Aviv during the hectic years which immediately preceded the racial outbreaks in 1936, both in its darker and brighter phases, for there is a glorification of the work of the *Haluzim*, the hardy Palestinian pioneers.

16. MICAH JOSEPH BERDICHEWSKI

The realistic current in the Hebrew belletristic literature of the latter part of the pre-War period, important as it was, still was not the only one. Side by side with it there flowed several currents of a non-descript character where many tendencies—the idealistic, the romantic, the realistic, and the folkloristic—mingled in different proportions. These currents often produced great talents and skilful short story writers and novelists. One of these who reflected in his numerous works of fiction almost all of the tendencies simultaneously was Micah Joseph Berdichewski (1865-1922).

Berdichewski was a colorful character in the Hebrew literature of the period and his influence was extensive. His activity was not limited to belles-lettres but embraced almost every form of writing. He was an essayist, a keen critic, a student of Jewish history, and a folklorist of note. Next to Frishman he was the most prolific writer of his day. Still it was not his prolific diversified literary activity that gave him the prestige and standing he enjoyed but the temper of his writings, and especially the peculiar tone of his essays. For a number of years, he was the *Enfant Terrible* of Hebrew literature and the representative of extreme secularism in Jewish life. Influenced by the

revolutionary tendencies in European thought in vogue in the last decade of the nineteenth century, especially by the current of Nietzscheanism, he entered the field of Hebrew literature and demanded a complete change in Jewish life, a reversal of the path of Jewish history. His motto was a "transvaluation of values"—a phrase borrowed from Nietzsche. In the name of that motto he fought vehemently against spirituality in Jewish life and letters, and denounced the entire course of Jewish history and the bearers of tradition from the prophets down who glorified the life of the spirit, morality, and law. He bewailed the subjection of the people to the book, and demanded a transformation, championing in its stead the free flow of life, the exercise of natural human passions and instincts, and the emancipation of the individual from the burden of tradition, and to an extent, from the group. Like his master, Nietzsche, he spoke constantly of the superman who is the aim and goal of human society. We will have more to say about his views and opinions on the subject, but for the present suffice it to say that not only were such expressions antagonistic to the entire trend of Jewish life and letters of all generations, including that of Berdichewski, but they were also out of harmony with the nature of the education and the character of the iconoclast himself. Among the Hebrew writers of the day, there were few who equalled Berdichewski in his saturation with Jewish spiritualism and subjection to the book. His ringing cry for action, material and physical enjoyment, admiration of strength, and glorification of passion, was a matter of theory and imagination and was in no way reflected in his personal life and conduct. Inhibitions and certain factors of heredity undoubtedly played a great part in the genesis of his views and a Freudian psychologist could undoubtedly throw some light on this phenomenon. Not being one, we may only say that the source of these incongruities was a disturbance of equilibrium in the soul of this gifted man of letters which, however, in no way impaired his ability.

In fact, he himself is conscious of this disturbance, for not only does he not emancipate himself from tradition but constantly bends under its weight. Almost pathetically he bewails what he pleases to call the "rent" in his heart (*Kerah she-be-Leb*), namely the struggle between his encompassing Jewishness, his love for the life and literature of his people, and the rebellion against all that these connote. The struggle between the influence of two worlds, the Jewish and the general, is

nothing new in Hebrew literature. We have noted it in many writers, but in no one was it as intense as in Berdichewski.

The intensity of the struggle, however, did not last long. The older stratum of his soul, the Jewish, got the better of the more recent layer, the secular, and the antagonism in his personality subsided, and his literary activity took a new turn. It expressed itself more in the form of short sketches of Jewish life in the town or the ghetto wherein the past, if not glorified, and indeed often satirized, was at least surrounded by a poetic halo. It also found expression in research and interpretation of the Agada, the great store of Jewish folklore, the fountain of inspiration to the Jew in his long struggle. Yet the echo of his intense struggle is heard even in his later works, especially in his belletristic writings. However, before we shall attempt to survey the numerous short stories of our author, we shall cast a glance at his life, the episodes of which will elucidate to an extent the diversified character of his works.

Micah Joseph Berdichewski was born in the town of Medzhibozh, Podolia, the very place where the founder of Hassidism lived and propagated his teachings. His father was the Rabbi of the community and young Micah was raised in a strictly pietistic and Hassidic atmosphere, and his education was the one usually accorded to a scion of a Rabbinic family. The future Hebrew writer and rebel thus absorbed in his young soul the best that there was in Jewish life, the love of knowledge prevalent in the Rabbi's home, the piety of the small Jewish community, the emotionalism and the religious glow of Hassidism, all of which helped to develop the poetic spirit of youthful Micah Joseph. To this must be added the natural beauty of the Ukrainian towns in which his family successively sojourned during his childhood and adolescence. At seventeen he was married to the daughter of a rich man in a Podolian town, who spared neither effort nor money to acquire the gifted youth as a son-in-law. The union, however, did not last, for the youth, as many others before him, found his way to Haskalah and when this was discovered by his fanatical father-in-law he forced him to divorce his daughter.

Micah Joseph then left for Volozhin and entered the famous *Yeshibah* of the town where he spent several years in an ideal atmosphere of learning, both Jewish and secular, for the Academy was also, though covertly, a Seminary of Haskalah. There he not only increased his

knowledge but also made his literary debut with a number of articles in various Hebrew journals and annuals. After leaving the *Yeshibah*, he wandered about for a number of years, settling temporarily in various cities and ultimately in Odessa where he prepared himself for entrance into a West-European University. He finally matriculated in 1890 at the University of Breslau, at the age of twenty-five. That year initiated a new period in his life and literary activity.

His contact with West-European thought created a disturbance in his soul. He, the son of a Rabbi, the Hassidic youth, the student of Volozhin, the writer of Talmudic discourses, became the disciple of Nietzsche, the glorifier of physical prowess, the champion of free play of the passions and enjoyment of life. In short, he became a rebel and he voiced his sentiments in numerous essays. During this period of rebellion and revolution he published short stories in all Hebrew journals and magazines as well as several books of collected essays. But at its close, the storm, as said, began to abate and his old self got the upper hand. In 1911 Berdichewski settled in Berlin and devoted himself to the collection and interpretation of the *Agadot* which had always held great attraction for him. His poetic spirit, his essentially, though erratic religious soul found some affinity with the Agada, with the folk legends, with the naïve story, and mystic lore. The result of his studies was two large collections of legends written in German (Sec. 78). A part of the first work was also written in Hebrew in two volumes under the name *me-Oẓar ha-Agada* (Out of the Treasures of the Agada). During this period he also prepared a work on the Bible and on the development of the Oral Law, part of which was completed and published posthumously under the title *Sinai und Gerizim*.

On the whole, the comparatively large collection of stories and sketches written by Berdichewski can be divided into two cycles. The first embraces all such stories in which the scene of action is laid largely outside of the ghetto or the town and in which the principal characters are primarily students who strive to adjust themselves to a new world. The second cycle deals mainly with the life of the town, its placidness and stagnation, as well as with the ripples that from time to time disturbed its apparently calm surface. In the first cycle, the larger part of which was written during the stormy period of the author's life, the rebellious spirit is expressed, but in a more subdued form than in the essays. It is rather the tragic phase of the struggle of the heroes, who strive to free themselves from the burden of their

heritage and to follow the inclination of their desires, which is stressed.

The first cycle contains two volumes, the first of which is called *mi-Huz le-Tehum* (Out of the Pale). The heroes of its stories are almost all of the same type, each expressing a similar conflict in a different way. They were all educated in the *Yeshibah*, all have pored over musty tomes, and all have absorbed the spirit embodied in them. Ultimately a time comes when they see the world in a different light, rebel against the book and the people who live by its rules and laws, and strive towards a new world and towards a new life. Some of them attain their aim and some continue only to strive and long. Thus in the story, *me-Eber le-Nahar* (On the Other Side of the River), the principal character, Nathaniel, goes through the struggle for *Haskalah*. He is married and loves his wife, but hates his environment. He makes the acquaintance of an enlightened family who live across the river which divides the town into Jewish and Gentile sections. He is enchanted by the new kind of life, a life of freedom, and wants to run away from his home, family, and environment, but his love for his wife restrains him. He chafes and protests against the multitude of books produced during the ages which weigh heavily upon his soul; he curses his life which is torn between two worlds, but he remains in the town nevertheless.

The other heroes, all *ex-Yeshibah* students, are more successful; they leave the town, enter universities in cities of Western Europe, live apparently unhampered and free lives—yet the battle is not won, for the shadow of their former selves interferes and draws them back. One of these students, the subject in the story *Biládeha*, who merely exchanged books of one kind for books of another kind, remains as far from his goal—the enjoyment of life—as he was in the *Yeshibah*. He loves a girl with all the passion of his young heart. She probably returns his love but neither is aware of it, nor does he tell her of his love for she belongs to another people and religion. He strives to forget his past, to throw religion to the winds, but his ancestral heritage restrains him and thus he suffers but dares not take the final step. The result is tragic; she becomes insane and he remains a broken reed.

This pathetic struggle is pictured at greater length in *Mahnayyim* (Two Camps). Michael, the hero of the story, is a *Yeshibah Bahur* and later a student at the University. He steps out of the Pale, lives among Gentiles and forsakes the ways of his people. However, he feels strange in his new environment. In one of his lonely walks he sees

a beautiful girl who captivates his heart. He later finds out that she is a Gentile and was born illegitimately. He decides to break with his past and marry her for she returns his love. An incident, though, intervenes. In his wanderings at night through the streets of the town, he is ensnared by a passing girl. This sin awakens in him all the ethical feelings of the ages, all the abhorrence of his ancestors for such an act, and he suffers the pangs of remorse. He despises himself and curses his newly-won freedom, and he mutters to himself, "Michael, do penance, lie down on the threshold of the synagogue and let the worshippers step upon you. Man, return to God." After three days of agony he leaves the town without even informing his beloved. Thus ends the serious attempt of the struggling hero to completely change his former self.

There is essentially little new in the content of these stories. The struggle for change, for widening of the horizon is an oft-repeated motive in Hebrew literature from the days of the Haskalah. Yet there is a difference. In the Haskalah stories the struggle is mostly external, the object to be attained is material well-being. With Berdichewski, however, the struggle is an inner one, and the object is life and its enjoyment. To this must be added the author's method which aims at depicting the state of the soul and subtle unexpressed feelings more than events. There is also a tendency on the part of the writer to overstep the limits of description and dwell on traits and episodes which are irrelevant to the main story or sketch, but it is a deviation which imparts a certain flavor to his works. The side remarks often contain grains of deep thought or a poetic glamor which add beauty to the story as a whole. The style is well adapted to the method for it is close to the Agadic and is especially suited for the expression of the emotions.

The second volume of this cycle, bearing the title *me-Emek Refoim* (From the Valley of the Dead) has for its theme, like the first, Jewish student life in West-European Universities. The heroes are of the same type except that the intense struggle and the sharp antithesis within their souls are absent. They too are failures and their life is stunted and empty of all content. They have a strong desire for love but are unable to grasp the opportunity, even when it presents itself, from sheer inability to make a decision. In other words, they are mere shadows, not living people, hence the title of the collection. In these stories the author vents his protest against the past of his characters which is the cause of their inactivity and apathy. Each of these characters typifies

a certain undesirable trait. One becomes an extreme sceptic who, in his quasi-philosophic analysis, destroys the value of all concepts, thoughts, and actions, and emerges only with apathy towards life. Another, whose love for knowledge and books is more a matter of habit than an inner urge, spends his entire life running from one lecture hall to another and in drawing books from the libraries but not reading them. On account of his frequent transfers from professor to professor and from subject to subject he is nicknamed *ha-Akbor* (The Mouse), for he only nibbles at knowledge but never feeds on it. He remains devoid of science though theoretically he strives to swallow all. The end is tragi-comic for he is run over by a truck while carrying two bundles of books. When he recovers, he leaves the University and becomes a religious teacher in a small town of Bukowina. A third is a dreamer. He imagines himself heading a new intellectual and political movement which makes the real things in life its goal, and simultaneously advocates the uniting of the Jews and the Moslems for the purpose of initiating a renaissance of Asia. He sees himself as initiator and moving spirit also of this movement, for he believes in himself and his ability. His time is spent in dreaming and not in assimilating knowledge. A fourth finds his life rather empty, for though he is married and is supported by his wife while he studies at the University, he has no love for her, and as a form of compensation he invents a story of a beautiful girl who loves him and who pursues him ceaselessly.

Thus the shadows pass before us, each of them representing a certain tragic corner of life. There is, on the whole, little depth in these stories, for the moral the author wants us to draw from them, i.e. that their former way of life was the cause of their misery, is hardly convincing, for many were the children of the *Yeshibah* and the ghetto who made their way in the great world and excelled in varied undertakings. Yet these stories are skilfully told and even the irrelevant remarks and episodes add interest to them.

The second cycle likewise comprises two volumes, one called *Bén ha-Homot* (Between the Walls) and the other *Meorot u-Ma'asim* (Events and Deeds). Each of these volumes consists of several small collections of sketches which bear various names. On the whole, we can say that Berdichewski is one of the ablest interpreters of the Jewish life of the town, especially of that of the Ukraine. As an individualist, he is more interested in personalities rather than groups, and in consequence his sketches are primarily devoted to a description of episodes

in the lives of individuals. In this cycle the writer is the objective por-trayer more than critic. He is, in general, a chronicler who records faithfully, though not dryly, types and events of the town. At times, however, he devotes himself more to the description of the general Jewish life than to that of the individual. In such cases, his sketch as-sumes the character of an essay, but it does not lose its poetic quality. Such is the exceptionally impressive description of the collective life of the community entitled *mi-Sh'ibud le-Geulah* (From Subjection to Redemption) in which the life of the Jews during the week days, from Sunday to Friday night, is masterfully portrayed. In these pages every phase of that life, both of the adults in their struggle for existence and of the young in their struggle with the hard problems of the Talmud, is depicted. Each day of the week has its character, its particular wor-ries. We experience along with the old and the young their struggles, and together with them emerge with a sigh of relief on Friday night—the eve of the day of light and rest—when both old and young gather forces for the new battle.

This picture serves as the background for the entire volume. The rest of the sketches are concerned with the dynamic side of life, for a community is never completely static. He does it, however, by degrees. At first, he describes the life of certain strata of the popula-tion, namely those who are engaged in commerce and pass their life in apparent action, and in contrast, those who are by nature apa-thetic and find their meager living somehow. He then turns to a description of smaller groups and their corresponding social position, and finally to individuals.

In his sketches, Berdichewski strives to be objective, though the subjective element is never really absent. He observes all phases of life, and particularly its deviations from the norm. Every incident, no matter how trivial, serves him as a theme for a sketch, and thus we have a gallery of types and episodes which reflect life in its entirety. He observes the unswerving piety of the common man, even if it is expressed in trivialities. Thus he describes an ignorant rich man in the town, Jacob Tiradin, who has risen from the depths of poverty to the highest social position in the community and who is offered the post of leader. He refuses the honor because he deems himself un-worthy on account of a slight religious transgression. Again, in a skilful dialogue, conducted with a pious youth he pictures the deep-seated belief of the youth of the town. To all difficulties and doubts

presented by the interlocutor, the youth repeatedly answers, "I believe in spite of them." He is thus a kind of Jewish Tertullian.

Our author seems to have a special predilection for the accidental in human life, for the meeting of opposite tendencies, for sudden changes, for the tragic and the mystic, and all these find expression in the sketches. Thus a small collection entitled *Naharayyim* (Two Streams) portrays incidents where opposite and unexpected currents meet. In the sketch, *Shutfim* (Partners), we meet two partners, one of fine stature, handsome face, and of excellent character; the other ugly and of mean disposition. They were opposites in every way yet strangely they were partners for many years. Such accidents are numerous and often change the course of human life. Hosea Nathan in *Bintayyim* (The Interim) was a poor man the greater part of his life who tried his hand at many occupations but failed, for which his wife, Malkah, had plied him with curses and insults. She died in an accident, whereupon Hosea Nathan began to reflect upon his conduct. Being forced to be self-reliant, he brought his life in order, took care of his children, and became an important person in the community. His business improved and he was persuaded to marry again. As soon as this marriage took place, the wheel of fortune turned once more; his family was increased, his new wife cursed and harassed him and disorder and failure once more beset him. Only in the interim, the time that elapsed between one wife and the other, did he enjoy life. Queer and strange characters abound in the sketches; we meet in them a pious Hassid who sets fire to a synagogue built by a Hassid of an opposing faction, for which he is, of course, severely punished both by Providence and the community. He dies forsaken by all and the Kaddish is recited by a strange and wild youngster who had contracted a peculiar attraction for this excommunicated man. There is also the story of the strange action of a group of butchers who used to steal cows at intervals and sell the meat. They finally stole the finest red cow in town which belonged to a leading member of the community who supported himself from the sale of the milk. The tragedy of the family at the loss of its means of support and the acts of stealing, slaughtering, and division of the spoils are portrayed very vividly and in lurid colors.

The mystic and the weird occupy, as said, an important place in Berdichewski's stories, as for example in the sketch, *Four Generations*. The author traces a certain streak of character in a family through four

generations, and reveals the somewhat sudden and mysterious manifestation of the same trait in a representative of each generation. Nathan Note, the head of the family, was a pious Jew but very irascible and of an essentially cruel and fiery temper which he was able to restrain only with great difficulty. That trait found an outlet in his fanaticism, asceticism, animosity towards heretics, and a noisy manner of praying and studying. He was always fighting the evil *Yezer* and himself. His daughter, Hannah Reba, a widow engaged in business, found a safety valve for that trait in keen business competition in which she was merciless, and in over-severe observances of the religious laws. With the grandson, Menasseh, the trait took the form of occasional outbreaks of violent temper which he could restrain only by secluding himself for the period of the attack of passion. The great grandson, Reubele, was a rebellious child who bullied the other children and was a terror to all who knew him. When severely punished by his father, he threatened to set the house on fire or to convert himself, and ultimately carried out the latter threat. Thus, concludes the author, is the way of the blood. It must manifest itself in one form or another.

Due to his search for the weird, for the existence of things intangible, Berdichewski succeeded in portraying the mysterious relation between man and the house he lives in. With remarkable skill he portrays in his short sketch, *Batim* (Houses), the deep attachment of a man to the home he built for himself and the tragedy when he must part from it. He creates for us a haunting picture of the shadowy presence of the owner hovering over the home which he has left.

That an unhealthy inclination for the weird and mystic is closely allied with the erotic, the secret outbreak of passion, is well known. Berdichewski makes considerable use of that motive and even attempts on several occasions to introduce the Oedipus complex, a thing which occurred very rarely in traditional Jewish life. Strangely enough, emphasis upon the erotic motive appears in his last belletristic production, the novel, *Miriam*, written before his death when his rebellious spirit had already calmed down. We are told that he intended to write a trilogy in which, through the experiences of the heroine, all aspects of Russian Jewish life would be depicted, including that of the town, of the large Russian city, and of the student; but only the first volume was completed. It was far from successful and though he called it a *Roman* (Novel), it hardly deserves the name for there is little action and little connection between its parts. The heroine is pictured as extremely beau-

tiful and of noble character, but we infer this merely from the statement of the author and not from any direct action of the heroine. Almost the entire work consists of a collection of small sketches, tinged with eroticism and it is like a Jewish version of Decameron. There are occasionally fine descriptions of certain moments in life, especially of the Sabbath and the holidays, as well as a few noble characters who flit through the story, but these features do not redeem the grave defects of the novel, which on the whole, presents a distorted picture of the life in the town.

In conclusion we may point out that many of the defects of Berdichewski are partly mitigated by his style which is a remarkable blend of the poetic and descriptive-realistic. In general, his sketches resemble in their style and method the older tales and legends, but they are distinguished by the peculiarity of his remarks and by his aphorisms. All these qualities impart to the sketches and stories of this gifted but erratic author originality. We may say that a somewhat expurgated and well-edited collection of his works would be a real boon for Hebrew literature.

We cannot part from this interesting and prolific writer without mentioning his two-volume collection of Jewish legends entitled *me-Ozar ha-Agada* (From the Treasures of the Agada). As stated above, Berdichewski devoted many years to the collection and classification of Jewish legends of all times. The result of his labors he embodied in many volumes written in German. The Hebrew volumes represent an epitome of the work in that language. Yet, though the quantity is limited, the quality is high, for the collection embraces choice legends and folk stories dealing with all phases of Jewish life and history, beginning with the creation of the world and ending with Hassidic lore.

The erudition and ability displayed in this work arouses our admiration, for the author drew his material not only from the wide and vast Jewish literature of the ages but also utilized many oral legends which were current among the Jews of Ukraine and were handed down from father to son. The classification of the stories follows both the historical and the subject methods, thus revealing to us both the views of the people on various periods of Jewish history as well as on phases of life and conduct. However, important as these qualities are, they do not impart to the work the peculiar value and distinction which it possesses. Its importance is due primarily to its belletristic and poetic character. Our author is not a collector of legends and folk stories, but their recreator. It is true, he borrowed the material from literary sources,

but he recast it in his own mould and supplied it with new form. Berdichevski, whose soul, though at times rebellious, was steeped in Jewish lore and saturated with its spirit, possessed an affinity for the fundamental tone in which the folk mind expressed itself; hence, the special harmony he created between the style of these legendary tales and stories and their content. It is simple yet poetic, and at times, contains grains of thought of great depth which beautifully interpret the meaning of the tale or story. The form thus ennobles and deepens the content and becomes of equal value.

The author, due to his early environment and training, had a predilection for Ḥassidism and therefore his Ḥassidic legends and tales, some of which are especially distinguished. The ecstasy of the followers of the *Besht*, their religious enthusiasm, their sanctification of life, and their attempt to rise above the ordinary norms, appealed to the heart of Micah Joseph which never ceased to strive towards something different from the drab prosaic daily life. Hence he showered upon the Ḥassidic stories the best of the gifts with which he was endowed. His tales of Ḥassidic life and his descriptions of their expressions of religious enthusiasm, especially their dances, are probably the best in modern Hebrew literature.

17. MENDELE MOKER SEFORIM (SHALOM JACOB ABRAMOWITZ)

Of all the Hebrew writers of the period who sought to depict the life of the Jews in the great East-European center—the Russian Empire—only one has the distinction of having succeeded in depicting that life in as complete a manner as possible. This, however, is not his only distinction, for he differs from most of the writers in numerous ways: in style, method of portrayal, themes, popularity among, and influence upon, the readers, as well as his peculiar pseudonym. That man is Shalom Jacob Abramowitz or as he is more widely known by his pen-name, Mendele Moker Seforim.

Mendele, who was lovingly nicknamed by the young writers “the grandfather (Saba) of Hebrew literature,” does not in reality belong to this period, for his literary activity began at an earlier date. Indeed, we have already made his acquaintance as one of the writers of the *Has-kalah* who devoted himself to criticism and to the spread of enlightenment through popular scientific works (Vol. III, Sec. 53). Moreover, most of his novels and stories were written in Yiddish, in the seventies

of the last century, but in spite of this, his belletristic works in their later Hebrew garb form an integral part of the Hebrew literature of the nationalistic period and one of its important assets, and he one of its illustrious writers.

Mendele often speaks of himself as of a double personality, as one in whom two Mendeles dwell side by side, at times in peace and harmony, and at times in strife, each pulling his way, so that as a result he does not know whither to turn. This metaphor really characterizes the literary history of this gifted author, except that it is incomplete, for there is still a third personality. The literary genius of Mendele had three existences or incarnations. The first, as noted, was as Shalom Jacob Abramowitz, the Hebrew writer of the Haskalah period. He then disappeared from that horizon, and soon emerged as Mendele Moker Seforim, one of the builders of modern Yiddish literature—the second incarnation. Ultimately, rather late in life, he underwent another metamorphosis and was resurrected as an original Hebrew novelist and short story writer. Not only did he write a number of stories and an autobiographical novel in Hebrew, but he himself translated, or still better, recast his Yiddish novels with such skill that no trace of the other language remains, and they can be veritably considered new creations, though the contents were not essentially changed, but rather improved and ennobled. It is the latest phase of his literary work which gave him primacy in the Hebrew literature of the period and was the basis of his great influence on a generation of writers, for while the literary existence of Abramowitz was forgotten and became a subject of interest only to historians the name *Mendele* was and still is a symbol of glory and creativeness to both writers and readers.

However, I do not intend to minimize the popularity which Mendele earned as a Yiddish writer. His services to that literature are inestimable, but since the role of Hebrew as a vehicle of expression for the Jewish genius is greater than that of Yiddish and Mendele himself began and ended his literary career in the former language in which he recreated all the works he previously had composed in the latter, I deem it proper to evaluate his creations in a spiritual milieu more fitting to his complete personality.

The three literary lives of Mendele and the method and character of his works are partly explained by the events of his life. Shalom Jacob Abramowitz was born in the town of Kapuli, in White Russia, a place distinguished for its natural beauty. His father, Hayyim Moshe, was a

leading member of the community, respected both for his learning and for his knowledge of worldly affairs. He himself supervised the education of his son, who, in addition to the customary instruction in Talmud, was also taught the Bible systematically by an expert teacher, a thing which was rare in those days. Young Shalom Jacob, who was endowed simultaneously with a keen realistic mind, a lively imagination, and a sense of beauty, found these studies greatly to his liking. Indeed, he even succeeded in enlivening the dry legal discussions of the Talmudic treatises as he tells us in his autobiography,⁴ by personifying the content of every subject he pursued. The contestants and debators of the Mishnah and Gemarah assumed for him, through his creative phantasy, a definite form and character. The long discourses on buying and selling, bailees and agents and similar matters of civil law reminded him of the days of the fairs held in his home town where there was much noise, excitement, and the pulsating life of commerce, and in the midst of all this, he, the small Mendele, fancied himself an important participant. The Agada and the Bible provided room for flights of fancy and fostered his sense of beauty which was augmented by his frequent walks in the shady forests and extensive fields of the environs of his native town.

All went well with the youngster until his thirteenth year when the death of his father precipitated the first great crisis in his life. He left, as he says, "his quiet and peaceful nest" and went to the neighboring city of Sutzk to study at the famous *Yeshibah*, which he exchanged after a few years for the *Yeshibah* of Wilna. In both of these he lived the life of a *Yeshibah Bahur*.

At the age of sixteen, he returned to his home town to find that his mother had married the owner of a small water-mill in a village a few miles distant from Kapuli. For several years he lived with his step-father, and there on the quiet farm, situated on the bank of a river and surrounded by thick forests where the birds sang by day and the wolves howled at night, the youth was saturated with the beauty of nature and his feeling for the grandeur of the physical world, which was later so gloriously expressed in his writings, began to develop. There too the incipient poetic sense of his childhood was reawakened and found expression in a number of immature poems which the youth wrote in secret in secluded nooks of the forest. Moreover, the satiric vein, which in future years dominated his writings, also found an outlet at this time,

⁴ Published in Sokolow's *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, 1889.

and both poetry and satire mingled in a drama which he composed in imitation of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto's *la-Yesharim Tehillah* (Vol. III, Sec. 17).

Literature, however, was not an occupation in those days and the youth, now eighteen, had to find something to do. He seized the first opportunity to leave his native town again, this time forever. This opportunity was a peculiar one. A man by the name of Abraham the Lame, a wandering beggar, returned at this time to Kapuli from his travels in Volhynia and the Ukraine, and described the wonders and riches of the fertile provinces to the poverty-stricken Jews of the town. His stories created a stir among them, but the only immediate result was the departure of Shalom Jacob and his aunt. The aunt who was an *'Agunah* went in search of her vanished husband, and *our hero* joined her in the hope of finding a position as teacher in one of the Volhynian communities.

The journey was made in a covered wagon, drawn by an old, lean, half-lame mare, the prototype of the later famous mare of Mendele Moker Seforim, in very slow stages, for the leader of the expedition, Abrahamel, had undertaken the trip for his own purposes and not for the benefit of his passengers. He merely utilized the *'Agunah* and her child as a means of increasing the income which he derived from begging, for he constituted himself her agent collecting money for a poor *'Agunah*; as for Shalom Jacob, he hoped to marry off the prodigious youth to a rich father-in-law and receive a fat commission. In this way the future Mendele visited a large number of communities in White Russia, Volhynia, Ukraine, and Podolia and observed Jewish life in all its variety. The journey, however, was far from a pleasure trip for the youth, for Abrahamel constantly urged him to display his knowledge of Talmudics in the cities where they stopped in the hope that he would be able to auction him off to some wealthy Jew as a son-in-law. Several times he even insisted that Shalom become engaged to rich fiancées and the youth's refusal to listen to his advice invariably enraged his self-appointed guardian. He then began to seek for an opportunity to escape his tormentor, and finally succeeded when they stopped at Kamenez Podolsk in Podolia. The youth remained in that city and soon made the acquaintance of the Maskil and Hebrew writer, Abraham Dob Gottlober (Vol. III, Sec. 40), a teacher in the government school of the town. This meeting gave a new direction to his life, but the experiences acquired by him and the impressions he retained of the beautiful land-

scapes of Volhynia and the Ukraine, accumulated during this strange and slow journey in the covered wagon, stood him in good stead and laid the foundation for the content and form of his later novels.

Through the help of Gottlober, Shalom Jacob found his way to the Haskalah and secular studies, and in a short time, during which he also succeeded in getting married and divorced, he obtained a teacher's certificate and a position in the local government school. Like all the gifted *Maskilim* of that age, he began his literary activity by writing in Hebrew, and for a period of ten years he was one of the leading younger literary lights in the later Haskalah epoch, composing works which we described in Volume III. During this time he also changed his residence from Kamenez Podolsk to Berdichev, the metropolis of Volhynian Jewry, where he also remarried.

The Hebrew works of the first period of his literary activity not only bear the stamp of the Haskalah, but also that of the special positivistic-materialistic strain in that movement which made its appearance in the sixties of the last century. In contradistinction to the first *Maskilim* who derived their inspiration from the romantic-intellectualistic German literature, our writer drew most of his knowledge from the Russian literature and was greatly influenced by its trends, though as evidenced by his *Toldot ha-Teba* (Vol. III, Sec. 53), he was quite well versed in German. He strove, therefore, not merely to bring enlightenment to his people but to improve their economic and social life, to eradicate the evils in communal life and, in general, to alleviate the misery of the masses which he knew so well and loved so deeply. It is true that other writers, such as Smolenskin (Vol. III, Sec. 44) had similar aims, but none were so permeated with that idea, and none possessed so all-embracing a knowledge of Jewish life as Abramowitz.

After a decade of intensive literary activity in Hebrew, doubt entered his mind, he tells us in his autobiography, as to the usefulness of his Hebrew literary work and he asked himself the question, "le-Mi-Ani Omel (For Whom Do I Labor)? The masses do not understand Hebrew; would it not be better to forsake the mistress for the lowly handmaiden—terms used at the time for Hebrew and Yiddish respectively—and earn less honor but be more useful to my people?" He thus was metamorphosed into the famous Yiddish writer, Mendele Moker Seforim. It was, as stated above, a veritable metamorphosis, almost a second existence, for not only did he change his language, but the entire form and the greater part of the content. Instead of preaching to his

people in publicistic essays and books he decided henceforth to portray to them their own life in all its forms and let them see its dark shadows and the grave defects which needed to be remedied. The preacher thus disappeared and the artist took his place.

We called the second period of his literary activity his second existence, but according to the theory of reincarnation, it is only the body that is renewed but the soul is old, or at least its most essential traits remain unchanged. And thus it was with our writer. The main purpose of his life, to improve the state of his people, remained unaltered. He did not become the mere artist who works for art's sake, but the artist moralist and social reformer who writes with a fixed purpose in mind. This is evident in the very pseudonym he chose, Mendele Moker Seforim.⁵ The traveling book-seller played an important role in the life of the Jews of the small towns of Russia during the greater part of the last century. He was the carrier and disseminator of knowledge, both religious and secular, the first openly, and the second covertly, and was thus the apostle of enlightenment to many a *Yeshibah* student. In addition, he was also the link which united the town to other Jewish communities, for he often acted as a living newspaper. On account of his travels and experiences, he was deferred to with respect by the masses who often consulted him on business and matrimonial matters and at times even asked his opinion on politics and communal life. As a man of somewhat liberal views and simultaneously impeccable piety, both due to his profession, he was a welcome guest in every Jewish community, and thus had the opportunity to observe Jewish life in all its phases and nuances and comment upon it authoritatively, critically, and charitably. This symbolic personality Abramowitz assumed when he came to the masses to talk to them in the language they understood best and in a style which is popular in both usage and vocabulary.

His first Yiddish novel was *Dos Kleine Menshele* (The Mannikin), published in 1864. This was followed by *Dos Winshfingeril* (The Wishing Ring) in 1865; *Die Takseh* (The Meat Tax); *Fishke der Krumer* (Fishke with the Crooked Legs) in 1869; *Die Klatche* (The Mare) in 1873; *Der Prisiv* (The Call to Military Service), a drama in

⁵ According to the testimony of I. H. Rabinzki, Abramowitz chose the name Senderel Moker Seforim in his first Yiddish work, *Dos Kleine Menshele*, which originally appeared in Alexander Zederbaum's Yiddish weekly, *Kol me-Baser*. But Zederbaum changed it to Mendele, so that it should not appear as a parody on his own name, for Alexander is shortened in Yiddish to Sender.

five acts in 1884; and the *Kizkur Mas'aot Binyamin ha-Shelishi* (The Condensed Travel Tales of Benjamin the Third) in 1885. Besides these important works he wrote a number of stories of slight literary value, translated into Yiddish the Friday and Saturday night songs known as *Zemirot*, and wrote a four thousand line historical poem entitled *Yudel* (a diminutive for Jew as well as for Judah), wherein the history of the Jews from Biblical times to the time of Mendelssohn is surveyed. These, however, together with the two dramas, *Die Takseh* and *Der Prisiv*, are to be considered merely as expressions of literary craftsmanship, for his fame rests primarily on the five novels which are real works of art. Of the content of these novels we will have more to say later; for the present it will suffice to say that they are a type of social novel and deal mainly with Jewish life as it was lived in the ghetto prior to the nationalistic period. The life portrayed is that of the older generation and there is little recognition of the inner strivings of the younger people.

In 1881 Mendele settled in Odessa as the director of the Hebrew school of the community, and there, with the exception of several prolonged visits abroad, he spent the last thirty-eight years of his life. The stirring events which occurred in Jewish life during the eighties of the last century, the pogroms, the rise of the national movement, the new trends and tendencies in Hebrew literature, did not cause Mendele to alter his view of the life or the destiny of his people. Yet they did not pass without leaving their impress upon him. Slowly the Odessa Jewish community, a center of both Hebrew literary activity and the new national movement, exerted its influence upon him and he returned to Hebrew literature not as the publicist but as the artist. In 1888 his first short story, *be-Seter Ra'am* (Hiding from Thunder), was published in the daily, *ha-Yom*. This story marks a departure in his literary activity in general, for in it the echo of the contemporary events—the pogroms—reverberates. The story was followed by a number of others which reflected the views of the author on the new life stirring in Jewry. He later turned to recasting his Yiddish novels into Hebrew, and thus *Dos Winshfingeril* was turned into *Emek ha-Bakah* (The Vale of Tears); *Fishke der Krumer* into *Sefer ha-Kabẓanim* (The Book of the Beggars); *Die Klatsche* into *Susati* (My Horse); while *Mas'aot Binyamin ha-Shelishi* retained its name. To these was added the autobiographical novel *ba-Yamim ha-Hém* (In Those Days) written originally in Hebrew. By this recreation, the novels became treasures

of modern Hebrew literature, for not only were they changed in language and name, but they were also exalted and refined in content. The events and movements, during the later period of his life, left some impress upon his character, and in one way or another, matured his judgment, deepened his feelings, and even improved his artistic sense. These changes were, of course, reflected in the recreation of his novels, so much that they attained in their second incarnation what the mystics call an *Aliyat Neshamah* (An Ascension of the Soul).

The last decade of Mendele's life was one of glory and honor, for though he wrote comparatively little during that time, his popularity and fame grew from day to day, and when he died in the fall of 1917, he was mourned by thousands of intelligent readers of both literatures, the Hebrew and the Yiddish, throughout Jewry.

From the survey of the life of the man, we can gain a glimpse of the character and nature of his works. The fundamental trait of his long literary activity is the constancy of the view expressed in its various phases. In spite of the vicissitudes which transpired in his life, and in spite of the fact that he lived for more than three decades in the post-Haskalah period and was in constant touch with the leaders and the moving spirits of the national movement, Mendele never changed his view of the life and of the destiny of his people that he formed in his younger years. He believed the Diaspora or the *Galut* to be a permanent feature in Jewish history, and felt that all attempts to solve the Jewish problem by schemes of a national revival on political lines are at best fine dreams but of little practical value. He further believed that the real solution to the problem lies in improvement along political, economic, cultural and educational lines; that improvement must come partly from without, namely by political emancipation, and still more from within, by eradicating all evils which the isolation and the one-sidedness of ghetto life had fostered.

He cherished the hope for the greater part of his life that the political situation of the Jews in Russia would ultimately be improved, and to this hope he clung even after the pogroms which broke out in the eighties of the last century, seemed to belie it. He was less surprised by them than many others, for he considered them an inevitable condition of the *Galut* life and so he continued to believe none the less in the future betterment of the lot of the Jews. It was merely a case of patient waiting for the rather slow, too slow progress of human civilization to take place. And of patience there was no lack among the

Jews. Meanwhile, inner improvement must go on, the evils must be eradicated so that Jewish life might become better, less aerial, and of a wider horizon. To that task he devoted himself and when he became convinced that the means he had employed in the early stage of his activity, namely the publicistic and critical Hebrew essays were not suited for the purpose, he changed the form and began to write his Yiddish novels which had only one aim—to improve Jewish life. He undertook a big task, namely to depict the life of the Jewish masses on a wide canvas—the Russian Diaspora—and to project its defects, even to exaggeration, so that his readers might be instructed by example. That life was, as noted above, the standard one lived by the Jews during the larger part of the last century, for only a standardized and permanent life, fixed by tradition and social sanction and custom, could yield to such treatment and serve his purpose—to accentuate the defects in the social character of the masses.

Mendele himself was not unconscious of the fact, especially in his later years, that changes had entered into the life he described, and furthermore that the new life had a right to be reflected in literature. He describes himself in his typical and inimitable style as wavering between two inclinations, being pulled, like the legendary coffin of Mohammed, by two magnets, one pulling towards the past which was fixed, well-settled, though externally unattractive, and the other towards the present which is colorful, glittering, and full of movement, though inwardly hollow.⁶ Mendele decides for the past not only because he was more attuned to its spirit, but also because he saw in it, at least at certain times, an inner spiritual beauty and nobility of soul, the effects of which were worth recording for posterity. "The life of the Jews" (in the ghetto), says Mendele, "although it seems externally ugly and of dark hue is inwardly beautiful; a mighty spirit animates it, the divine breath which flutters through it from time to time purifies it from all uncleanness which is swept into the "Tent of Jacob" by the storms and whirlwinds from without. Israel is the Diogenes of the nations; while his head towers in the heavens and is occupied with deep meditation concerning God and His wonders, he himself lives in a barrel and his dwelling-place is narrow and restricted (reference to Russian Pale of Settlement), yet under the dust and ashes of the ghetto, there burns the flame of the Torah from which emanate light and warmth for the entire people, and all our children

⁶ *ba-Yomim ha-Hém*, p. 14.

are learned and literate. Such a life is fit to be inscribed in the records and handed down to the future."⁷ Mendele did not often utter such sentiments, as the bulk of his works are devoted to the depiction of the unattractive exterior of life with a merciless minuteness. Still this passage and numerous others scattered throughout his works are sufficient evidence of the great love he bore his people and the life they lived, even though he insisted on beautifying and improving both in many ways.

There was also another cause which drew our writer even in later years to the life of the past. This was his belief in the permanence, at least for a long time, of certain traits impressed by the conditions of that life upon the character of the members of East-European Jewry, and that even those who consider themselves emancipated from the ghetto still harbor somewhere in their conscious or unconscious selves qualities and propensities of that character as formed during centuries. Hence, he thought, a description of that life, and especially of its defects, would bring about a more conscious effort to eradicate those traits.

Mendele was thus impelled to concentrate upon the portrayal and description of Jewish life of a generation ago in all its phases and details. He is the painter of a vast area of that life and this constitutes a leading trait in his belletristic works. In fact, his novels are called so only by courtesy. The real narrative part can be condensed into a few pages for there is very little development of a plot. As a rule, only a number of episodes are given in a connected order to serve as a frame for the series of portraits which seem to be the main purpose of the books. Even in the *Emek ha-Bakah*, the best of his novels, where there is a fairly developed plot, more than half of the content is devoted to description.

The greatness of Mendele, however, consists not merely in the extent of his description, but primarily in its highly developed artistic form and its distinctive character. He is the extreme realist and the great master of the art of portrayal. He presents the ghetto in its entirety with hundreds of details and does not omit a single type nor trait. So real is his description that we are inclined to agree with the view expressed by one of the ablest critics of Hebrew literature, that in time to come when even the traces of the ghetto will have been obliterated, a future historian will be able to reconstruct its life solely upon the basis of the description of Mendele in his novels.⁸ He himself in his

⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸ D. Frishman in Vol. I of Collected Works, p. 10.

autobiographical novel, *ba-Yomim ha-Hém* speaks of his method of portrayal as follows: "Solomon is a writer and draws the material for his novels from the life of the Keslonites (a symbolic name for ghetto Jews, see *infra*), namely he observes their ways and actions in the manner of the naturalists who observe the nature of creatures and discuss their characteristics. After observing these Keslonites in all their movements, habits, and customs, he portrays these peculiar creatures with his writer's pen exactly as they are, and tells the wonderful things which gladden the heart and increase knowledge."⁹

There is much truth in the author's description of his own method, but not the whole truth, for there is more in it than what he confesses. Mendele not only employs the exactness and detail of a scientist but lends color to his description and bestows upon it the charm of plastic art. Not only does he describe the dress of the Jews, their houses, their utensils, their manner of speech, their facial expressions, the movements of their bodies, in the minutest details, but he even catches those undefinable traits which are hidden from the ordinary eye and are revealed only to the artist.

The completeness and the vividness of the pictures are enhanced by his frequent inclusion of descriptions of animal life and inanimate nature. In the portrayal of both of these, Mendele reaches the height of perfection, for while in his description of his fellow-Jews he often exaggerates and draws some of the comic features of their exterior in too lurid colors forgetting for the moment that he deals with beings who have a soul, his realistic sense stands him in good stead in his portrayal of animal life within the bounds of the ghetto. The domestic animals—oxen, cows, goats, horses, dogs, and hens—are described by him not only artistically but with a certain understanding. He portrays the animals not only in various static positions, but also in movement and even becomes the interpreter of each of these movements. In the autobiographical novel mentioned above, while telling of the stir created in the town by the arrival of the villagers for the high holidays, he devotes more than two pages to the description of the manner in which the native dogs of the town receive the canine strangers who accompany their masters. In great detail, he contrasts the character of the village dogs which are simple, naïve, and righteous in their conduct, for they greet all strangers, be they rich or poor, with a bark of welcome, and that of the town dogs which are shrewd, lean, and hag-

⁹ *ba-Yomim ha-Hém*, p. 4.

gard, in constant search of food, and always worrying, like their masters, whence will come their sustenance (Parnasah). This description which concludes with the portrayal of a fight between Barker, the village dog, and Chestnut, a resident and native of the town, is one of the finest portrayals of animal life found in any literature.

Equally artistic are his descriptions of nature, save that here the plastic and static elements predominate; however within his limited field he is incomparable. There is hardly a phase of nature, whether spring, or summer, or the rainy fall, or the various landscapes of the Ukraine which Mendele did not depict in his inimitable style. The chief characteristic of his descriptions is the Mendelian flavor, namely the insertion of a Jewish note the like of which is not found in any other literary works. Other writers before him attempted to inject a particular Jewish note in portrayals of nature, especially the poet, J. L. Gordon (Vol. III, Sec. 39), but none succeeded so in the harmonious blending of colors as our writer. The following is a translation, though an inadequate one, of one of his masterful passages: "By and by the time of *Minḥah* (afternoon service; a Jew measured the day, like the Mediaevals, by the divine services) arrives. A pleasant breeze is wafted along and light clouds, welcome and long-expected guests, rise and float in the sky. The trees awaken, move slightly, and nod their heads to one another; they whisper and talk to each other in their own language after their long silence. A breeze stirs the grain from its sleep, and the ears wake up all together like children in the nursery with a noise and murmur; they caress and kiss each other expressing their love. The creatures of the Holy One, blessed be He, stir everywhere, in the field, forest, and in the air. Songbirds emerge one after another, on branch and bush, high and low; they stand and prime their feathers with their beaks, shake their little bodies, and begin the evening song of praise to God. Butterflies, adorned in variegated colors, dance and frolic in the air with grace and agility. Two storks appear at a distance in their white coats, their red feet dipped in the marsh while their eyes are raised to heaven in the manner of pious women after their ablutions. In the near-by grove the nightingale pours forth his song, and singers in the field and forest accompany him as choiristers their famous cantor. Even the frogs join in one grand myriad choir in praise of their Creator."¹⁰

Such passages, where the Jewish and general note blend in remark-

¹⁰ *Sefer ha-Kabẓanim*, p. 24.

able harmony, are numerous in his writings and add to the completeness of the portrayal of Jewish life and its environment, and the personified description even makes nature participate in the activity of that life.

From the static phase of Mendele's portrayal we shall pass to the dynamic, to his picture of life as it was lived daily by thousands of Jews throughout the East-European Diaspora, for while Jewish life in the southern provinces of Russia served the writer as a particular model, he reflected in his writings the life of the town in the entire area. The differences between the various sections were, on the whole, slight. Our writer deals primarily with three fundamental features which, in their unfolding and ramification, circumscribe almost the entire Jewish life of Russia. These are the narrowness of the intellectual horizon of most of the ghetto Jews of that generation, the lack of a sound economic basis, and the aerial occupations which were often accompanied by contempt for manual labor resulting in a peculiar form of naïveté extensively colored with provincialism and exaggeration, and finally, rampant poverty in all its degrees. These cardinal features were symbolized by him in the names of the three towns in which the scenes of his novels and stories are laid. The first is *Ksolon* (in Hebrew) or *Glupsk* (in Yiddish)—both derived from roots in Hebrew and Russian respectively which literally mean foolishness or ignorance but are used by him in a wider connotation as narrowness of intellectuality. The second is *Betolon* (in Hebrew) or *Tuneyadevka* (in Yiddish) signifying naïveté and impracticability. The third is *Kabziel* (in Hebrew) or *Kabzansk* (in Yiddish) connoting beggary.

These features which, as said, were fundamental, were not specific and individual but generic. Each of them was expressed in numerous phases of Jewish life and gave rise in turn to many other faulty traits of character which became fixed and permanent. Allied with these three main features are: impatience; an ability to concoct all kinds of impractical schemes; readiness to believe in, and grasp at visionary dreams instead of realities; loquaciousness instead of paucity of words; undue fear of officials with its consequent display of humility in their presence; excessive respect for riches and arrogance resulting in mismanagement of communal affairs; satisfaction with a minimum of the necessities of life, and many others.

Some of these traits had already been dealt with by the writers of the Haskalah period in their novels and stories, but none of them de-

lineated Jewish life in all its extent and depth as Mendele. It is primarily he who has given us an epitome of the life of the Jews in the East-European Diaspora and has emphasized the rueful consequences and results of centuries of isolation and oppression. He also differs from the writers of the Haskalah in method, for while they preached and proposed remedies for the defects, such as the spread of enlightenment or reforms in religious practices, he merely portrays and seldom preaches, for the artist in him restrained him from preaching directly, though he did so indirectly through description. Like the other *Maskilim*, he believed in enlightenment and thought it a cure for many evils in Jewish life. But in most of his novels, with the exception of *The Mare*, this view is indicated in a veiled and circuitous manner. His power of observation, moreover, also gave him a better perspective than his contemporaries and he saw that the roots of the evils of life in the ghetto did not lie in excessive piety, nor in lack of secular knowledge alone but in a combination of many factors of which poverty was the most dominant. He therefore devoted himself more to the description of the material and external side of Jewish life than to the purely spiritual and inner phase, although he did not neglect the latter entirely.

Our writer, as said, deals mainly with three themes, intellectual narrowness, naïvité and impracticability, and poverty, and all their consequences. But while he apparently employs them promiscuously in all his novels and stories, yet he seems to be employing a certain system in his dealing with these themes. Thus in the novels, *Sefer ha-Kabẓanim* or *Fishke der Krumer* and *Emek ha-Bakah* or *Der Winshfingerl*, poverty is the principal theme. In the *Masa'ot Binyamin* he describes primarily, through the characterization of the hero, the visionary tendency, the impracticability of certain Jews, and their inflamed imagination and its ludicrous consequences; and the birthplace of the hero is properly named *Betolon* or *Tuneyadevka*. Intellectual narrowness and its outgrowth is adequately described in short stories and other novels.

However, even more important than the themes is the art employed in dealing with them. The same power of observation, the ability to note details and to delineate traits hidden from the ordinary eye, which we noted in his description of the environment, are employed with even greater skill in his portrayal of the dynamic Jewish life. To these must be added the vein of satire with which Mendele was endowed in a great measure. Satire always exaggerates and enlarges the object of

its attention in order to bring out the grotesque and the ludicrous in large relief. Our writer undoubtedly was guilty of this error and his description of Jewish life and its shadows are frequently merciless and at times even unjust. As a result he was often condemned as a cold satirist who from the height of his position scrutinized the mass of creatures below pointing out their failings with malicious glee.

The case, however, was otherwise. Few of the Hebrew writers possessed as much love for the people as Mendele, and few were so much saturated with the spirit of the life he described and often ridiculed as he. The sigh that breaks forth from the writer's heart even while he depicts the scenes flutters through all his writings. This is especially evident in his description of Jewish poverty, for not only is it eloquent, but is done in such a poignant manner that we are moved and stirred. One of the chapters in the *Emek ha-Bakah* where the childhood of his hero, Hershele, is described, opens with the following sentence: "Alas, that eating is still a human need. Ah, what plight that one must eat! If it were not for that, Kabziel would have been a veritable paradise for Hershele." He then goes on to describe the constant struggle of this poor child with his stomach which is loud in its demands for food, and the tricks employed by the youth to quiet it, at least temporarily. In another passage he discusses in detail the peculiar compressibility of the Jewish stomach, with how little it can be filled and how easily its demands satisfied.

None of the Hebrew writers have pictured so vividly and so stirringly the awful battle for *Parnasah* which went on in the town, the merciless struggle for bread in which men lost their human qualities, forgot ties of blood and friendship, and strove to get the little the other possessed; the ceaseless vicissitudes many Jews underwent, flitting from business to teaching, from that to marriage brokerage, and many other occupations, and often ending by becoming beggars. The descriptions are interspersed with biting criticism and withering satire of the grave faults of Jewish life, the rather low esteem in which manual labor was held, the futile but passionate desire of the poor to be relieved of their poverty by miraculous means and similar traits which conditions impressed upon the denizens of the ghetto. Still, the sympathy, love, and participation in the woes of the unfortunates are all there and emerge even in the satiric passages.

It was Mendele who first introduced the child to Hebrew literature. Child life was almost entirely ignored in the novels of the Haskalah.

He, however, with his encompassing understanding, penetrated into the life of children and portrayed it in detail and with great compassion. With remarkable skill he describes the joy of children at play but with still greater talent their sorrow and their assuming all too early the burdens of life. He bewails the fact that childhood is hardly known in the town, for there are no children but only little Jews and Jewesses with all that it implies. He concludes one of such descriptions with the following pathetic words: "Children without childhood is both a sorrowful and frightful sight, arousing simultaneously feelings of revulsion and pity. Children without childhood are like artificial plants and flowers on the hats of women."¹¹

It was also Mendele who first gave expression to the suffering of the lower stratum in Jewry, for even the ghetto had its classes. Not only did he, like the other *Maskilim*, battle the communal evils, the mismanagement of public affairs and those guilty of it, such as the farmers of the tax on meat, the councilmen and others, but he described with love and sympathy the sorrow of the poorer classes and those who, through poverty or other circumstances, became the underdogs of the group. He portrayed the weariness and pain of the apprentices of the tailors, shoemakers, and carpenters toiling along through many years of semi-starvation and hard labor until they attained membership in the trade guild, the insults and humiliation of the Jewish servant girl, and his eye even penetrated the dark recesses of the few disorderly houses in the ghetto and he described the suffering of the women there with tenderness.

Not in vain does our writer speak of two Mendeles within himself, for there were really contrary traits in him, and while he often chastened his poor brethren by caricaturing their life in grotesque descriptions, he also sighed and wept at their misery, and that sigh reverberates through all of his writings.

Turning to the more concrete content of our writer's novels it is interesting to note that, on the whole, the plots can be condensed into a few pages, and at times even into a few lines, for he is not a novelist of the usual type who elaborates a plot in stages and emphasizes the development of the personality of his principal characters in sequence. He is a social novelist, a literary photographer and painter; the plot serves him merely as a frame for the group of pictures he endeavors to draw. There is, however, a kind of preferred theme in each of them

¹¹ *be-Seter Ra'am*, p. 4.

which subsumes many subsidiary themes. In his first novel, *Dos Kleine Menshele*, Mendele is primarily the *Maskil* who combats the mismanagement of the community by the mighty heads of the *Kehillah*. He presents one of these leaders, Abraham Takeff, in his real light with all the pusillanimity and trickiness he employed in order to attain power. The small man is represented as a parasite who fastens himself upon one stronger and richer than he in order to utilize him for his purposes. Takeff represents that type and he tells in an autobiographical form or rather confession of his manipulations in order to attain power and wealth. In doing so he covers a large section of Jewish life of that day. In order to conclude with the customary happy ending, Mendele makes Takeff regret his conduct and become a follower of the Haskalah and found, with the help of an enlightened Rabbi and another *Maskil*, a modern school for the education of Jewish children.

In the *Sefer ha-Kabẓanim*, Mendele attempts another significant theme, the description of beggary among the Jews at that time and its injurious effects upon social life. Though the Yiddish original bears the title *Fishke der Krumer*, Fishke is not the hero of the book. It is in reality a group of travel tales of a comic nature. The author in the role of Mendele, the traveling book-seller, makes one of his business trips in his covered wagon drawn by the famous mare. On the way he collides with another covered wagon, the owner of which turns out to be a certain Alter Yaknehoz, (one of Mendele's allegoric and grotesque names; the word itself is an abbreviation of the order of a certain holiday ritual), a fellow traveling book-seller and an old friend of Mendele. A conversation ensues in which Alter tells Mendele of his affairs at the fair at Yarmolinz, and especially of his bad luck in marriage brokerage which he pursues as a side line. He was about to conclude a match between two wealthy parties when it was discovered that both were young men. In his haste he had forgotten to ascertain the sex of the young people. This comic episode reminds Mendele of another match, that of Fishke, who on account of his lameness and crooked feet, was the ward of the community of Ksolon in exchange for which he performed some services at the public bath-house. One fine morning Fishke was suddenly married off by a group of charitable people to a blind beggar woman. The bride was supposed to be given in marriage to some one else, a poor porter, but at the last moment, the groom changed his mind and the charity-workers, who did not want

to lose the sumptuous wedding feast, substituted Fishke as the groom.

Meanwhile a number of things happen to Mendele and to his comrade, Alter; their horses are stolen by the leader of a group of traveling beggars, and Alter succeeds in getting them back and also in saving one of the troupe from the hands of their leader who intended to murder him. That man is Fishke. He is placed on Mendele's wagon and Fishke relates his vicissitudes since his rather sudden marriage. He was persuaded by his blind wife to become an itinerant beggar and for a long time they traveled from town to town on foot until one day they joined a troupe of "cavalry" beggars, namely those traveling in wagons. From that moment Fishke's troubles began. The leader, Red Notke, contracted an animosity towards him and persecuted him in many ways, even alienating his wife from him. He became the butt of the troupe, hated and laughed at by all with the exception of one, a hunchbacked girl, who was herself persecuted. Fishke was attracted to the girl and planned to deceive his wife and leave the troupe together with the girl. The leader, however, discovered the plot and interfered, and tying Fishke to a tree, left him there while the troupe together with Fishke's wife and the hunchbacked girl, departed. It was there that Alter found him. It turns out that the kindly girl was Alter's daughter by his first wife whom he had divorced. Thus the story ends. As has been indicated, the value and artistry of the work are expressed not in this simple plot but in the extensive description of Jewish life of the day reflected in the numerous episodes which are rather loosely connected with each other. Especially extensive and detailed is the description of the life of the beggars in all its phases and stages. During the travels in the covered wagon of Abrahamel in his youth, Mendele saw much of that life while wandering from town to town and he utilized this knowledge in his descriptions. There is much humor in the story and even biting satire, but also many expressions of sympathy for these unfortunate beggars. The character of this travel tale afforded the author the opportunity to include some remarkable descriptions of nature.

In the *Sefer ha-Kabẓanim*, Mendele described Jewish poverty on the march. In the *Emek ha-Bakah*, the theme is poverty in the town. On the whole, the latter is a more connected story than the first and the plot is more developed. It is the story of the life of a Jewish boy, Hershele, a native of Kabẓansk. The author follows him from the time of his birth to the state of manhood when he finally emerges

from the ghetto, acquires secular knowledge, and becomes useful to the world and his people. His story is detailed; much space is devoted to his childhood, education, his life as a student of the *Yeshibah* in the larger town of Ksolon, and even his incipient love for Beile, his childhood playmate, is not omitted. In his usual manner the author complicates the otherwise simple plot by introducing subsidiary tales which are loosely related to the main story. Thus along with Hershele's life we have that of Beile who also comes to the large town to procure a position as servant in the homes of the rich but falls into the hands of white slave dealers from whom she is ultimately rescued through the efforts of Hershele and of a merchant, Raphael, a *Maskil*. The same man also saves Hershele himself from a life of poverty and futility by sending him abroad to perfect himself in his studies. There is also a parallel story of Moshele, son of Shmulik, a peddler, a friend of Hershele who, like the latter, was raised in poverty and goes through similar experiences. He is ultimately seized by the agents of a near-by Jewish community with the intention of turning him over to military service, but is saved by another carrier of enlightenment, Michael Sapir, and is sent to the government Rabbinical Seminary. There is also a love incident. Raphael falls in love with a young woman, Hanze, the wife of an ignorant young Hassid. She is finally divorced from her husband and united with her lover.

We thus have all the elements of the usual Haskalah novel and the happy ending where enlightenment appears as the great boon. The value of this as in all other novels is the extensive artistic description of Jewish life. In this novel, which went through several stages until it reached its final perfection in its Hebrew form, Mendele rises to the highest artistry within his ability. He puts away his satiric sting and pictures Jewish life with sympathy and love. Even the hated poverty assumes a more sympathetic air. He finds some virtues in it, such as that poverty sobers a man and makes him self-reliant; it also, through common suffering, brings parents and children closer together, and similar qualities. There is a distinct idealization of Jewish life. Hershele and Moshele are ideal Jewish children. Likewise, there are a number of other types, such as the pious and elderly Rabbi Abraham who befriends Hershele, the inn-keeper Reisee and others who charm us with their deep human sympathy. The pictures the author draws of the Sabbath in the house of Shmulik, the rags peddler, of the preparations of Leizer Yankel, Hershele's father, for his role of cantor on the

High Holidays are idyllic and emphasize the inner beauty of the ghetto life which is so completely described by our author.

The Hebrew title, *Emek ha-Bakah*, is undoubtedly more fitting than the original *Winshfingerl*. The earlier title meant to indicate that enlightenment was the magic ring for the possession of which Hershele in childhood, together with many inhabitants of Kabzansk, longed. It was typical of Haskalah striving. The Hebrew title connotes that the Diaspora was a vale of tears, but not of tears which stunt and embitter the soul, but of the type which exalt and purify it.

Our author is less charitable in his novel or quasi-novel, *Masa'ot Binyamin ha-Shelishi*. It seems that the other Mendele, the satirist, got the better of him in writing this work. The theme is the impracticability and the inflamed imagination of some of the ghetto Jews, and the scene is originally laid in Betolon, the allegoric name for incarnated naïveté and impracticability. The title has reference to Benjamin of Tudela (Vol. I, Sec. 195), famous Jewish traveler of the twelfth century. In the middle of the nineteenth century another Jew by the name of Benjamin made extensive travels and recorded them under the name of Benjamin the Second (Vol. III, Sec. 92). The author, therefore, called his hero Benjamin the Third. The plot is insignificant. The imagination of the hero is inflamed by the stories he reads about the "Ten Tribes" and various tales of Jewish travelers and he decides to undertake a journey into far distant lands to find those tribes and thus ascertain the time of the coming of the Messiah. He is by nature a coward and is in mortal fear of his wife, but he overcomes all obstacles, and succeeding in persuading Senderel, a simple Jew of a practical turn of mind, to accompany him, he proceeds on his journey. The adventures of the travelers whose exploits were ultimately limited to visits to several near-by communities are described in detail with grotesqueness and much humor. The influence of Cervantes' famous book, *Don Quixote*, is evident, for Benjamin is the Jewish Don Quixote and Senderel, the Sancho Pancho. Benjamin lives in a world of visions, while Senderel attends to their practical needs. The adventures end when both travelers are seized by agents of a community and turned over to military service only to be saved from that ordeal by their physical unfitness. There is much of the comic in the descriptions of Jewish life which, due to the form of the book as a record of travels, are extensive, and there is also great exaggeration and merciless satire. However, beneath all this there is a current of sym-

pathy for the tragedy of misdirected idealism and noble striving which under other conditions might have been beneficial, but on account of a circumscribed horizon and gross ignorance of life, ends in both a disastrous and comic manner.

The same tendency to satirize certain traits of Jewish character which grew out of ghetto life and oppression, such as impracticability, impotence, and hurried, unpremeditated action is in evidence in his short stories which belong to a later period and were written originally in Hebrew. In these stories, the Haskalah motive disappears, and the events of the time are reflected in sharp and fast colors. In some of these the satire and irony is directed more at the external world than at the inner. Such are his stories, *be-Seter Ra'am* (Hiding from Thunder) and *Shem we-Yefet ba'Agalah* (Shem and Yefet in One Car). The former deals with the pogroms, and strikes a tone of bitter irony in his description of the capture of his famous mare in "war," namely its seizure by the hooligans. He insists on calling the pogroms a war, for he says robbery or theft is usually punished, while in this case nothing but praise is accorded the heroes of destruction. He develops a caustic note in his analysis of the cause of the war, insisting that it can not be the wealth of the defeated for Kabzansk possesses no riches. The introduction to the story which is quite lengthy is of no less interest than the story itself. Mendele felt that the typical town life which he had hitherto described, was disappearing, and that he must turn to the large city, but he believed too that many of the traits and features were carried over by the ex-Kislonites and Kabzielites into their new environment. He wished, therefore, to give a general characterization of their life and customs so as to perpetuate them for posterity and to prognosticate their new incarnations in the future. It is a detailed study, colored with satire and sympathy.

The second story is directed towards the external world and is devoted to a keenly ironical treatment of the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany in the eighties which resulted in the expulsion of all non-citizens, Jews especially, from that country. In his characteristic way he describes the movement of hatred. "The German," says he, "turned time backwards to the days of the flood. A Jew is no more called a Jew but son of Shem (Semite) and a non-Jew a son of Yefet (Aryan). The Semites are accused of grave transgressions, such as that they dare to eat and drink like men or even that they dare to multiply like human beings." How peculiarly modern the words

sound. The story itself is both tragic and comic. It describes the wanderings of an exiled family, that of Moshe the tailor, who are accompanied by a Pole, an exile like the Jew, whose name is twenty-one letters long but whom the tailor calls Yefet for short. The strange companionship has a story behind it. The tailor and the Pole had been great friends for a long time, but with the rise of Jew hatred, the latter turned against his friend and against all Jews and even precipitated a pogrom. However, ultimately, he too was exiled and in a Galician town the two met again. The Pole, poor and without work, apologized to the tailor who forgave him and undertook to teach Yefet the ways of Jewry, namely to learn to suffer, to become expert in satisfying the demands of the stomach with a minimum, and similar matters. The Aryan speedily became an adept pupil and henceforth the pair wander together.

Both irony and satire directed against the inner world are contained in the two-chapter story, *be-Yeshibah Shel Ma'alalah u-be-Yeshibah Shel Matah* (The Upper and Lower Sessions), in which two different meetings of Jews are described. The time is that of the pogrom in Warsaw and a group of Jews, including Mendele, are hiding in an attic. There are all types in that group from extreme fanatics to complete assimilators. The feeling is one of friendliness and the conversation is permeated with a sense of unity and participation of common suffering. Differences are forgotten, the liberal become more conservative, and the extreme orthodox more liberal. When the pogrom is over and Mendele attempts to meet his erstwhile brothers, the situation is changed; they all revert to type. The fanatic is as stiff and unyielding as before, and the assimilator is as far from his brethren and as humble to his Polish comrades as if nothing had happened.

Similar irony is expressed in *be-Yemé ha-Ra'ash* (The Stampede). The theme is the early days of the *Hobebé Zion* movement (Sec. 1) when fabulous rumors of the immediate settlement of Palestine were floating in the air and a large number of Jews rushed to Odessa, the center of the movement, to offer themselves as settlers. It is this rush, the hurried and unpremeditated action, which Mendele satirizes in the presentation of one of the would-be settlers. Leib the Melamed, was a jack of many trades. In addition to teaching he dabbled in *Shadhanut* (marriage brokerage) and several other occupations, and when all these sources of *Parnasah* dried up, his last hope was to become a pioneer in Palestine. It is interesting to note that while our

author was at first even unsympathetic to the national movement, as he considered it an imaginary dream, yet he draws a fine portrait in that story of Dr. Pinsker, the moving spirit of the movement.

There are a number of other stories of merit, and the autobiographical novel previously mentioned, *ba-Yomim ha-Hém*. The last is a masterpiece of description of Jewish life in earlier times presented through the medium of personal experiences, but its contents are so diffused that they cannot be summarized.

We have left for the last Mendele's allegorical work, *Susati* (The Mare), though it was written as early as 1873. The work as a whole is antiquated and out of date but it contains many elements of a permanent nature, and by the irony of fate they are as timely today as they were sixty-five years ago. The book was intended as a complete presentation of the complicated Jewish problem reflected in the inner life and in the oppression and persecution from without. It is, therefore, both a criticism and an apology. The basis of the allegory is a Midrashic interpretation of a verse in Canticles which reads, "I have compared thee, O my love, to a mare among the horses of Pharaoh" (Canticles, I, 9). The Midrash which takes the entire book of Canticles as an allegoric dialogue between God and Israel, applies this comparison to the Jewish people. To this is added the poetic parable of Heine in one of his poems wherein he speaks of the Jewish people as an enchanted prince who is turned into a dog and leads a miserable and accursed life the entire week but reverts to his former self on the Sabbath. Mendele utilized these two elements in shaping his allegory, but emphasized the Midrashic form, for the mare on whose back people ride and which is made to perform all kinds of work, served as a more fitting symbol for his ideas.

The frame of the allegory is as follows: Yisrolik, a Jewish youth whose mind has been affected by excessive study, sees visions and hallucinations. In one of these visions, the following scene appears before him. A bruised and lame mare is pursued by a company of street urchins and by a pack of ferocious dogs. The former throw stones at her and prod her with sharp sticks; the latter bark at her and bite her. As a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, he interferes on behalf of the unfortunate mare and asks the urchins why they persecute her. Some merely laugh at him, but the more moderate among them answer that this animal is a stranger and has no right to pasture in the fields which belong to the owners of the

other horses. Yisrolik becomes interested; he goes in search of the mare and finds her at night in a swamp. The mare begins to talk, telling him of her origin, and thus there begins a series of conversations. The mare relates her tribulations and suffering through the ages, the types of dogs that barked at her and tore her flesh, the riders who rode her and still ride her at their pleasure, both foes and supposed friends, and the heavy tasks she is made to perform. In this catalogue of woe, the communal Jewish leaders, who utilize the masses for their own purposes, come in for their share of reproach. Yisrolik remonstrates with the mare, and attempts to show her that perhaps she herself is at fault and that the cause of her suffering is her backwardness and poor manners, and to support his contention, he reads to her a letter which he received from the officers of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The letter says that the animal must first be cleansed, combed, and educated before her case can receive their attention. This is, of course, a reflection of the thought of the day when friends from within and without insisted on the need for enlightenment. Then follows a withering criticism of the Haskalah by the mare. She protests vehemently against such accusations and points out that the cause of her suffering is not lack of education but the lack of nourishment which is due to persecution. She demands not mercy and sympathy but justice, the granting of elementary rights to breathe and live without molestation. This, of course, reflects the author's own attitude that the poverty of the masses is the gravest problem of all.

This particular idea is presented with greater force in the scene of the Asmodeus which is a kind of summary of the problem. Asmodeus or the Ashmodai, as he is most popularly known in Jewish lore, king of the devils, appears to Yisrolik and offers him instruction on the situation of the mare. He tells him that the greatest need of the poor is food, and the lack of it is the cause of all inner disorders, and reveals to him that there is one remedy for all ills, namely equal treatment in this world with all other creatures, but this the Ashmodai will never allow. He has an old grudge against the mare dating from the time of Solomon and is interested that she should continue to suffer. He then takes Yisrolik for a ride in the air to show him his empire and power. The chapters that follow are literary masterpieces, permeated with irony on civilization and its results. The Ashmodai shows Yisrolik in his first flight scenes of misery, stretches of land where once there were fruitful fields and vineyards destroyed by war, large fac-

tories where arms are manufactured for destruction of human lives, extensive cities where misery and poverty stalk abroad, scenes of pogroms, and similar sights. Yisrolik shudders but the Ashmodai smiles and offers to show him scenes closer to his heart. He points out to him parliaments where the fate of the mare is discussed and new laws enacted against her, and finally brings him to his office. There Yisrolik hears reports, read by the secretary, of diabolical manipulations in Jewish communities and of laws aiming at new persecutions and discriminations against the Jews. Ashmodai beams at the reports, but he is not satisfied and he gives an order to open the pipes which carry a certain kind of ink. That ink contains the gall of toads, the poison of serpents, and pestiferous elements of all kinds. In this ink the devils dip the poor mare so that she turns black of the darkest hue. "That is not all," says the Ashmodai; "thou, Yisrolik, must become the rider of the mare to take the place of a leader in the Jewish community who just died." He refuses but is forced to accept. However, when Ashmodai demands an oath of allegiance, he denies the request and is thrown down by the diabolical king into the abyss below. In his descent, Yisrolik screams, "Woe is me, I am perishing." But a voice is heard, "Israel shall not perish." It is the voice of the mare, an expert in suffering. Thus ends this remarkable allegory.

In his usual way, Mendele adds to the main theme subsidiary ones which he connects in some way. One of such themes is especially distinguished by its beauty, lyrical pathos, and tragic note. It touches upon suffering in the world, contrasting it with the beauty in nature. On a beautiful summer morning Yisrolik lies stretched out on the grass in the forest listening to the song of the nightingale in which he detects a sorrowful note. Gloomy thoughts enter his mind and he reflects upon the suffering in life; scenes of cruelty pass before him, suffering inflicted by men upon animals, by man on man, by class on class, and finally by the nations upon Israel. In his description of all these stages of suffering Mendele rises to great heights, and the chapter constitutes one of the masterpieces of world literature. It most likely served as an inspiration to Bialik to write the remarkable couplet in his poem, *In the City of Slaughter*, describing the Kishenew Pogrom:

The garden blossomed and the sun shone bright
The *Shohet* slaughtered

The allegory as a whole needs no commentary. Barring the criticism of the past life, it could be written today. The Ashmodai, incarnation

of evil in men, is still here, and the hatred towards a people which was the first to preach justice and kindness, is still rampant, and even more vigorous than sixty-five years ago.

In conclusion, we can say that although the typical and limited world which Mendele described is gone, and many features of his writings are obsolete, yet there is much in them that is permanent. As an original artist of a *sui generis* type, as a colorful historiographer of a past Jewish life, and above all as a portrayer of poverty and suffering, which unfortunately will last as long as the world will not be ruled by justice and righteousness, he is still the outstanding Hebrew writer. Last but not least, his inimitable Hebrew style will long continue to be a great contribution to Jewish letters.

18. MINOR NOVELISTS AND SHORT STORY WRITERS

The writers hitherto dealt with can be considered the leaders of Hebrew belles-lettres during the larger part of the period under discussion, approximately up to the World War. It is they who impressed their stamp upon Hebrew fiction and gave expression to its various currents. There were, however, numerous others who aspired to the title of novelist and tried their hand at short story writing. These were a motley group. Some were leftovers of earlier times who had extended their literary activity into the nationalistic period and continued the Haskalah strain, though in a much modified form. Some echoed the tendencies of their time in a less skilful way than their more able confrères, and some even exhibited great talent and would have made important contributions to that branch of literature had they concentrated their efforts in that field, but their aspirations carried them to other forms of literary expression where their genius unfolded itself to its fullest extent.

The most important of this considerably large group were Menahem Mendel Dolitzki (1850-1932); Yekuthiel Berman (1825-1890); David Isaiah Silberbush (1856-1925); A. Singer (1864-1930); E. Goldin (1867-1915); Wolf Yawetz (1847-1924); J. L. Katzenelson (1847-1917); and Y. J. Levontin (b. 1861). Both Dolitzki and Berman, though raised in the Haskalah period, represent a departure from the beaten track of the novels and stories of that time, inasmuch as they turned from the inner to the external phase of Jewish life. Oppression from without, suffering from persecution and discrimination is their theme.

i. The first, who was no mean Hebrew poet (Sec. 27) and who first gave expression to the national revival in fine lyrics, also drew a gruesome picture of Jewish persecution under the Czarist regime in two novels, *Ben Lebaim* (In a Den of Leopards), published serially in *ha-Meliz* in 1884 and *mi-Bait u-mi-Huz*, published in the same manner in 1890 and appearing separately in 1891. The first novel pictures the effects of the pogroms and the earlier expulsion from the large cities of the Empire situated outside of the Pale of Settlement. The second describes the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow in 1890 which was carried out with thoroughness and severity. It has hardly any plot and it is futile to speak of its principal characters and of the portrayal of the development of their personality, for they are all lacking. This so-called novel is a tale of woe by the author, of his tribulations at the hands of the police who hounded him for his illegal residence in Moscow, and his desperate efforts to escape expulsion. There are, however, some heartrending portraits of the plight of several other Jewish families. The indifference of the privileged rich Jews to the misery of their poor brethren is also touched upon, and hence the name, *From Within and from Without*, for that attitude is as severely condemned as the persecution from without. The style is euphuistic and is interspersed with numerous Biblical verses and fragments of verses.

ii. Berman composed the novels, *ha-Shodedim ba-Zoharayyim* (Mid-day Robbers), published in 1887, and *ha-Yetomim* (The Orphans), begun in 1886 but finished ten years later, both of which deal with the pogroms in the south of Russia and their effects. The former describes the pogrom in Odessa in 1871, and the latter portrays the vicissitudes and tribulations of two orphaned children whose parents were killed during the persecutions in Rumania in the late seventies. There is little art in the work, but the author demonstrates considerable skill in concatenating the numerous events and episodes which surprise us by their sudden turns and unexpected situations. It is, on the whole, of the type of the popular novel. The style is Biblical but less euphuistic than Dolitzki's and is to a great extent adapted to the content which is narrative rather than descriptive.

iii. Silberbush, who represents the Galician strain in the Hebrew fiction of the period, which was otherwise a product of Russian Jewry, was a prolific writer in the field of both the novel and the short story. The two most outstanding of his works are *Dim'at Ashukim* (The Tears of the Oppressed), published as early as 1890, which deals with

the misery of the Jews in Rumania, and *Ma'asé be-Ishah Ahat* (The Story of a Certain Woman), published in 1923, but written much earlier. In his short stories he reminds us of his countryman, Brandstätter (Vol. III, Sec. 45), with his light humor and portrayal of Galician Jewish life.

iv. The stories and the novels of Abraham Singer are of a higher type than the works of the preceding writers. They deal with contemporary Jewish life, and his portrayal of the changes which that life gradually underwent has a realistic ring. He is especially masterful in the description of the tragic episodes which result when the denizens of the ghetto desert it and its fixed pattern and become residents of the large city. His long story or novel, *Beli Tekumah* (Without a Basis), one of his later productions published in 1903, deals with Jewish tribulations in the eighties of the last century.

It did not take long ere the rise of the nationalist movement and the subsequent practical results of the incipient colonization of Palestine began to be reflected in Hebrew fiction introducing in it a new note. We thus have a group of writers who in their stories expressed their attitude towards the movement. On the whole, the attitude was positive, one of sympathy and love, but here and there we also hear a dissenting voice. There were, as noted above (Sec. 1), among the writers of the day—in the eighties and early nineties—men who, though enlightened, saw in the national movement a tendency to secularize Jewish life and feared lest secularism and materialism should take the place of the idealism which had, as a result of devotion to religion and Torah, permeated that life during the ages.

v. Ezra Goldin gave expression to this view in his stories and his two novels. The motive in all of them is the idealization of the older type of Jewish life as expressed in the conduct of the masses. Special emphasis is laid by him on the love of Torah and learning which was implanted in the heart of every Jew. He therefore pictures with great sympathy in several of his stories the *Yeshivot*, the students and their tribulations, and reveals to the readers the inner light pervading these institutions and the lives of those that dwell there beneath the gloomy exterior. One of his stories, entitled *le-Mekom Torah* (On to the Place of Torah), is entirely devoted to the exaltation of the love of the Torah which was so integral a part of the life of the masses during the period of the recent past. Besides the portrayal of the character of the hero who is entirely devoted to study, the author also presents another

character—a poor youth who is seized with a burning desire for learning and knowledge. Unable to acquire learning himself on account of his limited intellectual capacity, he satisfies that desire by becoming an attendant at a *Yeshibah* and performing various services for the senior students, so that they may devote themselves entirely to the study of the Torah. He thus becomes a participant in the fostering and cherishing of knowledge in Israel.

It is in the name of this love of Torah, the diminution of which Goldin bewails, that he opposes the secularizing tendency of the new national movement in his novel, *Demon Yehudi* (A Jewish Demon), published in 1901. The principal character, Aryé Shed (Aryé the Demon) reminds us partly of Ibsen's Dr. Stockman and partly of the typical Haskalah heroes. His name is derived from a story of a meeting with a demon in the form of a beautiful girl, a story concocted by him in order to save the reputation of his beloved who met him secretly. His lonely life is pervaded by two passions—study of the Torah and the alleviation of the misery of the poor of the town. During a large part of the day he collects money for the needy which he distributes anonymously, and the night he devotes to learning. In his youth he had passed through the usual struggle for enlightenment and had left his home and visited universities and academies in search of knowledge and a way of life. He found knowledge but no way of life. Disappointed in his quest and also disappointed in love, he comes back to his home town and champions reforms in Jewish life, endeavoring to purify it from its defects, and to introduce among his fellow Jews the practice of the ideals of Judaism—love of fellow-man, humility, modesty, and charity. He is thwarted in his efforts by the opposition of the communal leaders and the superstition of the masses, yet he succeeds to a degree for he finds followers among the youth of the town. One of these, a certain Samuel who, on the advice of Aryé, had left the town in order to pursue secular knowledge, later returns as a physician and helps Aryé in his work. Times changed, and Aryé is no longer feared but hailed by the poor as a deliverer. Samuel becomes the head of the community and is revered and respected by all. He is the second hero of the novel, the ideal young Jew. It is he who gives utterance to the criticism of the national movement. It is secular and strange to the Jewish spirit, and worst of all, it diminishes the love of the Torah in the heart of the Jew. The author who is the narrator of the story attempts to defend the movement, but is silenced by Samuel who points

to the fact that while devotion to the Torah raised many an ideal type, nationalism had not yet shown its power of inspiration. Thus did Goldin, who was saturated with the spirit of the older type of Judaism, express his sorrow at its gradual disappearance as well as his doubts of the new ideals which had come to take the place of the old. There are also fine realistic portrayals of the daily life in the town at the time, of the poverty of the masses, and similar phases, but it is the romantic note, the longing for a life which should combine the ideals of the past with the best there is in modern civilization which imparts value to the novel and more than compensates for its faulty technique.

vi. Goldin however found few followers, while the national movement found many advocates who expressed their enthusiasm for its ideas and for the new Palestinian life in their works of fiction. Wolf Yawetz was the first who gave voice to these sentiments although story writing was not his forté. He distinguished himself more as an essayist and historian (Sec. 100), yet he was not the dry scholar to whom knowledge represented the goal of life. He was filled with a passionate love for his people and with deep religious piety. The national movement was to him not merely a solution of the Jewish problem but a form of religious expression and it kindled within him an enthusiasm which glows in a number of stories written during the years 1888-1898 when he lived in Palestine, wherein the new life which began to form there is vividly reflected. In fact, they can scarcely be called stories for the plot is reduced to a minimum; they are mainly descriptions of the life of the colonists or still better, a series of portraits of that life. This, however, does not detract from their value, for they possess a freshness which was up to that time unknown in Hebrew fiction. They unite both the romantic love of a Mapu (Vol. III, Sec. 43) for Palestine with the note of realistic understanding of the new life. In his great optimism and living hope for the success of the renaissance, the author glosses over the defects in that life and shows the readers only its bright side. His sketches are, therefore, mainly limited to the description of festal episodes, namely the celebration of the festivals in Palestine. Yawetz was not only a good observer, but had an eye for beauty both of nature and man, and these qualities impart an idyllic character to his stories. Their charm is greatly enhanced by the style which combines the majesty of the Biblical Hebrew with the elasticity and flow of a spoken and living language. It is especially distinguished by the coinage and creation of a number of words and terms to express the nuances

of a new life. This linguistic creation was, on the whole, very successful and was characterized not only by a fine philological sense but also by an intuitive feeling of appropriateness, and many of his coined expressions have become common property in Hebrew literature.

vii. The sketches of Yawetz gave an impulse to other writers to express a strong sentiment for a return to the soil. This yearning for a normal life and indirectly for Palestine was the leading motive in several of J. L. Katzenelson's stories. Katzenelson, or as he is known by his pseudonym, Bukki ben Yogli, was a physician by profession and a scholar by inclination. Like Yawetz, he made important contributions to Jewish learning in his own field as well as in other branches (Sec. 97), but also like him, he had a feeling heart and a poetic soul. In his spare moments he penned sketches of Jewish life and wrote beautiful legends and fantastic tales. One of his best stories is the *Shirat ha-Zamir* (The Song of the Nightingale). It is the tale of the strong desire for the soil and its cultivation which suddenly seizes Shlomeh, a Jewish lad who was, as all youngsters of his age, absorbed in the study of the Talmud and its commentaries. The awakening comes about in a curious fashion. In his daily reading of the *Shema* he notices that God promises rain, good harvest, and vintage as a reward to his people for righteous deeds. And he begins to wonder whether they are meant to be peasants and farmers. But on more careful study he finds out that agriculture was the main occupation of his people in former times and that the prayers, the Bible, and even the Talmud are filled with references to the soil and its blessings. Why then do the Jews no longer occupy themselves with the cultivation of the soil? Was not the Torah given to people who live on the fruit of the land? This problem gives him no rest. Attendance at a village wedding affords him the first opportunity to glimpse at the beauties of nature, and he is charmed by them. There too he hears the song of the nightingale. The song evokes in him visions of Biblical times and these pass before him flittingly one after another. Henceforth the song permeates his soul and fans his desire for the soil into a passion. The memories of that day to which are joined those of a meeting with his cousin, Dinah, a beautiful girl of his own age remains with him for a long time. Shortly afterwards he is sent to the *Yeshibah* but he stays there only a short time. The call of the field is too strong and from time to time he forsakes his studies and goes to the village to participate with the peasant boys and girls in all kinds of field work. He is found out and declared insane by his

teachers who inform his parents of the abnormal conduct of their son. Thereafter he disappears and his parents mourn for him as lost. After ten years, however, he returns to his home, tells his parents that after many tribulations he had succeeded in becoming the owner of a large estate in the state of Missouri in America and that he is now on his way to Palestine to settle there as a colonist. The impulse to change the fertile fields of Missouri for the rocky, desolate soil of Palestine was awakened in him by the song of a nightingale which, like the first nightingale, recalled to him the beauties of that far-distant land which once belonged to his ancestors. His parents and Dinah thereupon decide to join him on his journey.

The value of the story does not lie in the simple plot which obviously has much of the fantastic in it. It lies primarily in its poetic spirit and romantic Biblical atmosphere in which the whole story is enveloped. The series of scenes taken from the entire Jewish history and the picture of the life of the people on the land which pass before Shlomeh while he hears the song of the nightingale are especially charming and thrill us by their poetic flight. Throughout the book there is heard the passionate call of the loving heart of the author to his people to return once more to the soil of their ancestors. In the nightingale scene we may, of course, detect the influence of Mendele's famous chapter on the song of the nightingale in the *Mare* (Sec. 17). In fact, there is even a verbatim quotation from Mendele, but while the former used the song as a vehicle of expression for the sorrows of life, Katzenelson employs it as a means of arousing a noble passion.

The same motive was utilized by Katzenelson in one of his poetic legends called *Adné ha-Sade* (The Earth Men). It is based on the belief, mentioned in the Midrash (Kohelet Rabba, Ch. VI, 11) in the existence of mythical men who grow out of the earth and are attached to it by a cord issuing from their bodies, and draw their sustenance from the earth. The story relates the adventures of a man coming to the abode of a herd of such animals. They wonder at him and consider him abnormal. He, on his part, observes their life, their struggles for an inch of land, and at times commiserates with them for being limited in their movements to the length of their cords while he is free to roam. Yet he envies them for their attachment to the soil. A strong longing seizes him to be like them and acquire such a cord. He makes several attempts, lies down on the ground, but with little success. Hope, however, is given him that after many trials success will be his.

That this is an allegory depicting the role of the Jews among the nations is quite evident. There are also several fine ironical passages and keen satire on the attitude of the field men toward the strange detached being.

Clothing of ideas in the form of legends and fantasies is a trait which distinguishes Katzenelson from many of his contemporaries. There is hardly a legend or story which does not touch upon some phase of the complicated problems which beset Jews and Judaism. One of these entitled *Shené Kuntresim* (Two Brochures), written before his death, is especially distinguished by the depth of thought and warmth of feeling for the ideals of Judaism. The brochures are diaries supposed to have been written in Spain in 1486 by a young Jewish physician, Don Gedalya de Nargila and his wife, Honya de Roderigo, the daughter of a Spanish grandee. The author, according to his testimony, found them during the Russo-Turkish War in 1878 in an old house of a Bulgarian city in which Don Nargila and his wife had settled after the expulsion. The diaries tell of the spiritual conflict which the man and the woman of two different nations and religions underwent before love overcame all obstacles and they were joined as man and wife. They are of great human interest and full of noble thoughts on the ideals and aspirations of Judaism. The author, through the mouth of Don Nargila expresses his views on the subject by discounting the current nationalistic theory that there is a secret inexplicable power which preserves the existence of the Jewish people and forces even those members of the race who strive to escape Judaism to remain within the fold. He is not satisfied with this explanation, but expresses his belief that Judaism has an intrinsic value which makes all suffering for its sake worthwhile. The hopes of the prophets and their visions of the time for the end of days when peace and righteousness will reign among all men are still with the Jews, and it is their mission to give humanity a third religion in addition to the two which they had presented long ago—the religion of righteous life and peace. There is nothing new in these ideas but the artistic form in which they are expressed and the skilful way in which they are interwoven in the frame of a story, which possesses both the glamor of legend and of human interest, endow them with a particular power of inspiration.

viii. The echo of the national movement is also heard in the novels of Y. L. Levontin (b. 1861). He made his first attempt in *Yemé ha-Ma'ase* (Days of Action), wherein he sought to picture the change in the views

and opinions of the Jewish university students after the pogroms in the early eighties, their return to their people, and their espousal of the cause of nationalism. The attempt was not very successful for the personalities of the characters are not fully delineated and the greater part of the novel is devoted to discussions and debates so that the work is more of a publicistic than of a belletristic nature.

The second novel, *Simon Ezyoni*, is of superior quality. In this story, the author aimed to point out the gross materialism and egoism of the Jewish followers of the socialist movement of the time, on the one hand, and the idealism and nobility of character of the devotees of the nationalist movement, on the other hand. Simon Ezyoni and his paramour, Alexandra Levi, both formerly active in the clandestine socialist movement and one time prisoners in Siberia, represent the first type, while the engineer, Malkin and Miriam, the sister of Ezyoni's wife represent the second. Ezyoni upon his return from Siberia, goes to St. Petersburg and forgetting his ideas, plunges into big business enterprises with a view of obtaining riches and power. In the pursuit of his aims he is rather unscrupulous and rides roughshod over all who stand in his way. For a time he is not disturbed and peace reigns between him and his wife, Sarah, a woman of noble character, who had suffered along with him and voluntarily shared his fate in exile. But then Alexandra Levi, his former associate in the illegal movement, comes to the capital and with her beauty captures the heart of Ezyoni. They still talk of idealism and the sad fate of the Russian masses and disparage everything Jewish. Their actions, however, belie their words, for Levi does not hesitate to disrupt Ezyoni's family life and cause him to divorce his faithful wife and marry her. In contrast to the character of these two egoists, the author presents Malkin and Miriam. Both are proud of their Jewish heritage, detest the quasi-humanitarianism and pseudo-idealism of Ezyoni and Levi, and declare their sympathy for the new nationalistic movement. Malkin is active in Jewish student circles, helps the poor among them, arouses their interest in Jewish affairs, and propagates the national ideal at their meetings. Miriam's idealism is displayed in fiery speeches against the assimilated friends of Ezyoni. Much love and sympathy is also lavished by the author on Sarah who, in addition to her nobility of character, also possesses a deep religiosity which she maintains in spite of the protests of her infidel husband.

It must be admitted that the aspirations of the national movement do not find full expression in this novel and are merely hinted at in general

terms. It seems that the author places more emphasis upon the negative effects of the socialist movement upon the Jews than upon stressing the positive effects of the national tendency. That was left to the imagination. Later, however, Levontin wrote a third novel entitled *mi-Ben ha-'Arafel* (Out of the Mist) wherein the emphasis is placed entirely on the positive side of the national ideal.

ix. The national ideal also inspired some writers to try their hand at the portrayal of a Utopian Jewish life in Palestine in a distant future. Such a vision, which could compare well with the works of this kind in other languages, was written in 1892 by Elhanan Levinski (1857-1911), one of the leaders of the *Hovevê Zion* movement and a writer who distinguished himself in another field of literary endeavor, as a feuilletonist. It is entitled *Mas'a le-Erez Yisrael be-Shnat Tat* (A Journey to Palestine in the year 2040). It is the tale of a traveler who, together with his bride, journey from Russia to Palestine to spend their honeymoon there, and he relates what he sees of the life in the rehabilitated country. As in all Utopias the life of the future is endowed with the qualities of perfection and is represented without blemishes, but the distinguishing characteristic of the work is the Jewish spirit which permeates the vision. In the author's day there was no Arab movement and the cloud of pan-Arabism did not darken the seer's horizon. The Jewish state of the future therefore has no political boundaries and embraces both Eastern and Western Palestine, as it did in Biblical times.

The visionary sees before him the entire extent of that country peopled largely by Jews who, of course, live in peace and harmony with the non-Jews dwelling in the land. Agriculture flourishes, for it is the basis of the national economy, but industry is also developed, especially in the southern part of the country around the Dead Sea and the Valley of the Jordan—the present industrial enterprises on their shores prove to a certain extent the keenness of the writer's vision. The civilization in the state is of a very high order and the latest inventions and scientific devices are utilized to the fullest extent. Railroads intersect the country, electricity turns the wheels of many factories, and passenger-carrying aeroplanes soar overhead. The brightest phases, however, are the political, social, and cultural. The Jewish state is a model state distinguished by its liberalism and love of peace. Freedom reigns everywhere and peace is the slogan of all, and many villages, parks, and plazas in the city bear its name. Yet since there are still warlike tribes on the eastern borders, a small army is maintained.

The government levies no taxes, but derives its income from the ownership of all public utilities, railroads, and mines. Such ownership helps to solve the economic problem, the real solution of which, however, is supplied by the introduction of the Biblical law of the Jubilee which makes it impossible to deprive any one of his ancestral land. Fields and houses are sold only for a number of years and prices are determined by the annual income and the number of years that still remain until the Jubilee. As a result there is neither poverty nor extreme riches, though a modified capitalism exists. The same loyalty to Jewish tradition is evident in the cultural situation. Schools abound, universities and technical academies are numerous, science and secular learning are cultivated, but Jewish knowledge, the Bible and the Talmud are important subjects of study in all institutions. The head of the Jerusalem University is called Elijah Gaon (reference to the Gaon of Wilna, Vol. III, Sec. 11), which indicates that he possesses both secular and Jewish learning to the highest degree. Palestine is, of course, a center of influence because of its model life and government, but especially does it exert its influence on the Jews of the world who still live in large numbers in many countries. Thus did a Jewish writer dream fifty years ago of the future of his people on its own land. Though we are at present still far from the realization of even a part of the Utopia, it yet inspires us with its flight of imagination and the nobility of spirit.

Levinski also wrote a number of sketches entitled *Roshmé Mas'a* (Traveling Impressions), telling of his travels through parts of Russia and of his observations of Jewish life in the various cities he visited. They are distinguished by the mild humor with which the author was endowed and many thoughtful and witty remarks, but contain little description either of nature or the manners and customs of the people.

x. Travel sketches of a high quality were written by Getzil Selikowitz (1856-1927). Selikowitz, who was a colorful personality, served for a long time as interpreter in the English army during Kitchener's campaign in the Sudan. This necessitated numerous travels through Egypt, the Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia. His impressions of these countries and their inhabitants are described in his *Ziuré Mas'a* (Travel Portraits). The impressions are tinged with poetic coloring in the description of some curious episodes in the life of the primitive peoples and are written in a flowing Biblical style which contains much lyricism and Oriental charm.

19. HISTORICAL NOVELS

The rise of the national movement awakened an interest in Jewish history as well as a desire to glorify its heroes and dramatic moments through the medium of stories and novels. However, there were as yet few writers who could undertake such a task, of breathing life into a forgotten past and, on the basis of dry facts, of revivifying the spirit of an epoch or period long past. The need was, therefore, supplied by translations from other languages, and a number of historical novels written mostly by German Jewish novelists were rendered into Hebrew. The novels of Meir Lehmann were held in special favor by the translators. But while most of the translators did their work of rendition faithfully and with various degrees of success, there was one, A. Friedberg, whose work in this field deserves special mention. He was not a mere translator but also collaborator, inasmuch as he recast the works and added to them much of his own and impressed upon them the spirit of the nationalism of his day. He translated the historical novel, *The Vale of Cedars*, by Grace Aguilar (Sec. 85), dealing with the life of the Marranos in Spain, made some additions to it, and in general, recast it in such a way that it expresses the deep piety of the characters and their suffering for their faith in a truer spirit than the original. The most valuable of his works of this type is the *Zikronot le-Bet David* (The Records of the House of David), a series of historical stories which cover almost the entire history of the Jews from the time of their return from the Babylonian exile to the end of the eighteenth century, the time of Mendelssohn. It is not a translation but is modelled after a similar work in German by Reckendorf, and while the author also possibly utilized some of the material of his predecessor, it is none the less largely original. The fact that the principal character in each story is a descendant of the House of David explains the name of the work. This device also supplies a kind of continuity to the diverse stories. The historical part is faithfully done and the facts are skilfully interwoven with the narrative. There is a fair sequence of events and an abundance of warmth of feeling expressed in the glowing utterances of the principal characters. There is, however, no deep pathos in these stories nor a penetrating insight into the spirit of the periods described. They are historical narratives more than history revivified through the actions and emotions of the characters.

20. *THE PALESTINIAN CENTER OF BELLES-LETTRES*

The outbreak of the World War and the subsequent events which changed completely the map of Jewish life in the larger part of Europe, both externally and internally, interrupted, as stated above, the growth and development of modern Hebrew literature. Sporadic attempts were made during the first years of the World War to publish several annuals and miscellanies but soon even these attempts ceased. The great literary center of Eastern Europe ceased to function. However, in the place of the East-European center there rose another—Palestine. One by one and in small groups there began to gather in the new settlement in the East the scattered writers of the Diaspora and they immediately began to pick up the interrupted thread of their productivity and resume their activity. It did not take long and there grew up an extensive literature in all its branches, and especially fertile was the field of fiction. New writers arose, younger talents who distinguished themselves in these works, and their fame put some of the older writers in the shade, while those who made their debut in the pre-War period renewed their energy and increased their creativeness. The transformation of Hebrew into a spoken language gave a great impetus to the development of the literature, for it was no more a spiritual luxury but became an intellectual and cultural necessity. As a result, the novels and stories written during the decade and a half of the hegemony of Palestinian center equals, if not exceeds, in quantity those produced in the much longer pre-War period.

The transference of the Hebrew literary activity to a new place and the more favorable conditions it enjoyed during this short period did not, on the whole, change its character. The time was too short for the new life to impress the so-called Palestinian fiction with its stamp, and consequently there is only a small number of writers who are natives of the Palestinian soil. The great majority came from the East-European Diaspora—Russia, Poland, and Galicia—who were saturated with the life, views, and education of the lands of their birth. In fact, there is an evident reaction in the Palestinian fiction towards the portrayal of Jewish life of the recent past, the former ghetto life. The short duration of the life in Palestine as well as its incompleteness and the fragmentary shattered life of the contemporary generation of Jews of the Diaspora do not form the proper material for

real creative works. Many of the writers turned, therefore, to the ghetto and its romanticism as a source of inspiration, and once more, the Hassid, the typically pious Jew, the communal leader of the town, became the principal character of the stories. Folklorism thus forms a trait of the literature of this epoch. The more distant the past seems, the more glorious it appears and the more complete. Some writers even delve into periods of Jewish history further removed from the scene of their stories, and the result is a production of historical novels which constitutes the second feature of Palestinian fiction. The third feature is the increase of novels as against the domination of the short story of earlier times. These, however, do not exhaust all the features of the Palestinian literature, for while there was no fundamental change in its character and it continued to a great extent to follow in the older tracks, there are some modifications and new notes. The new life did make some impression and it is reflected in a number of stories which are Palestinian both in color and content. Here and there a writer appears who affords us a glimpse into an hitherto unknown corner of life, that of the Jews of the East, while another reveals to us a bit of that of the picturesque Arab and Bedouin. Thus the recent Hebrew fiction becomes more variegated in the texture of its themes and more colorful in its portrayals. This constitutes its fourth feature.

21. A. A. KABAK

A. A. Kabak (1883) is one of the most prolific belletrists of the later period. He is primarily a novelist, and made his debut in literature with a complete and fully developed novel, entitled *Lebadah* (Alone) in 1905. He followed his first production with several other novels which formed a kind of sequel to the first, and in which the same or similar types of characters are portrayed. With the outbreak of the War his activity was interrupted, but was resumed after he settled in Palestine in the early twenties. He enriched Hebrew belletristics with three single novels, a trilogy, and a drama or two, besides several translations. Kabak thus excels his contemporaries in the same field by the quantity of his production as well as by the extensiveness and complexity of his plots, for he was the first and thus far the only one of the Hebrew writers to attempt a trilogy. He excels them, however, in many more things, for besides possessing artistic skill in the portrayal of life around him and penetrating observation into the soul of the characters he presents, he is also endowed with much learn-

ing as well as with the technique of a narrator. This learning and knowledge he utilized to good advantage, especially in his historical trilogy. His technique in narrative writing is expressed in the harmony displayed in his novels and stories between objectivity and subjectivity. Kabak, unlike many writers, does not indulge in psychological scalpel-ing and in interjecting between the actions of the characters monologues and soliloquies of the author, but on the contrary, lets his heroes act and speak for themselves without interrupting the flow of the story. On the other hand, the subjective stamp is quite in evidence, for the author expresses his ideas and views through numerous dialogues of the characters. These views and ideas are many and varied, for Kabak is one of the few writers whose purpose was not only to describe life but to illuminate and elucidate a number of fundamental problems, some of which are peculiar to the Jews and some common to all men.

In general there are to be distinguished two phases in Kabak's works which correspond, in the main, to the periods of his activity. In the pre-War novels, the attention is centred upon the young generation, their struggle within the double environment in which they lived, their peculiar national and social problems which they faced, their reactions to them, and the tragic or semi-tragic results of these situations. In the later novels written at a more mature age in Palestine, the problems dealt with are of a general nature, embracive in their extent and deep in their import, affecting the life of man as a being in which two or more worlds meet. The main problems which interested the author are love and suffering, the relation between the two, the struggle of man to rise above the world of animalism to greater heights, and his frequent failings to achieve his aim. The first problem is dealt with in the novel, *Ahabah* (Love), while the second is taken up in the historical trilogy, *Shlomoh Molko*. In both the influence of Tolstoy is clearly in evidence.

The plot of *Ahabah* is simple and the number of characters few. There is no hero or heroine, but three out of the five or six characters take leading parts. The scene is laid in Geneva, Switzerland, in a colony of Russian-Jewish students and intellectuals. Martow, a Russian Jewish poet, in the forties, who had had many affairs in his life, falls in love with Pilzia Kreinin, a Polish Jewish woman who had been married in her youth to a fanatical *Hassid*, but had later left him and gone to Geneva to live a lonely but unhampered life. They seem to

be fitted for each other in temperament and have need of each other. All goes well until Martow meets Pulia, a young girl of great beauty and charm whom he once knew as a child in Russia. He is captivated by her beauty, freshness, and vivacity. He is conscious of the difference in age, but she intrigues him, for while she appears light-minded and full of the joy of life, there is beneath that mask a tragic note, and from time to time she expresses thoughts of deep meaning. Love, she says, must not be enjoyed and satisfied, for the more distant it is, the more beautiful it seems. Women must only love and not expect realization. Similar thoughts are expressed by Kreinin who suffers greatly from Martow's interest in Pulia which results in a cooling of his love towards her, though not in a break. She repeats constantly that women must love and suffer. This is their lot and in it they must find happiness.

Little by little, Martow sobers; he feels that he is old and that the love of youth is not for him. Pulia has many admirers, among them a certain Cohen, a rich manufacturer from Russia who follows her constantly but Martow discovers that she really loves a poor student, an idealist, Einhorn, but hides her love deep in her heart while she yields to the courting of Cohen. On pressing her for an explanation, she opens her heart to him that her love is like the Sabbath garment to Jewish girls in her native town of Rishkova nestling among the forests and swamps of Polesia. They wear it only one day a week and are afraid to soil it in the drab week days. The end is that Pulia marries Cohen and returns with him to Russia while she still loves Einhorn. Martow goes back to Pilzia Kreinin, for his is not the love of youth but of early fall which is beautiful and quieting. The underlying note is that real love must give more than take and that suffering is inseparable from it. All characters express the idea and Einhorn even declares that women love to ascend the Mount of Golgotha, nay even to bear the cross, an echo of Tolstoyism which preaches suffering as a means of exaltation of life. The narrative is well connected and the sequence of events logical, and occasionally there is a lyric and poetic tinge to the descriptions of the actions and thoughts of the characters.

The same idea that love and suffering are inseparable is expressed by Kabak with even greater intensity in the historical trilogy, *Shlomoh Molko*. But there the motive is only a subsidiary one. The main purpose of the author seems to be the portrayal of the struggle which constantly goes on in man to rise above his native animalism to greater

heights, his frequent failings, and the great sacrifices involved in the struggle and tragedy resulting therefrom. This tragic conflict between opposite forces in the human soul which is typified in the lives of saints, martyrs, and great idealists, our author chose to present in the imaginary story, but quite close to historical reality, of the life of Molko. He certainly could not have chosen a better hero for his purpose than Molko, that charming, accomplished, young Marrano of Portugal who forsook pleasure and glory at court, turned mystic, and flashed like a meteor on the dark horizon of suffering Jewry in the years 1528-1532, preaching hope and redemption to his brethren and finally dying a martyr's death.

In a postscript to the second volume the author justifies some of his deviations from historical truth on the grounds that it was not his intent to write an historical essay nor a novel in the accepted meaning of the term, but to deal with a human problem, especially as it manifested itself in its religious expression. He mainly endeavored to portray the life in which these problems were embodied and incarnated and express the spirit of that period. We must admit that he succeeds in his endeavors and really affords us a glimpse into the inner recesses of the Jewish soul during a most interesting period of Jewish history, the first half of the sixteenth century, a period saturated with mysticism and Messianic aspirations. We feel and hear the palpitation of the heart of Jewry fluttering between grim reality and the bright visions of redemption presaged by mystic and pseudo-Messiahs or their forerunners, such as Shlomoh Molko professed to be. But the merits of his book are so great that we can easily forgive him his deviations from historical reality.

In the first volume of the trilogy called *Ahabah*, Molko's life in Portugal is portrayed. He is first presented as Don Diogo Pires, a pious Christian who was raised in a monastery. But it soon becomes apparent that even from his youth his is a dual personality for he retains a dim memory of his martyred parents and is therefore easily influenced by Ferdinand, a friend of the family, who instills in him a love for Judaism, to secretly attend the Marrano synagogue. He grows into a handsome youth, is a favorite at court, and becomes secretary of the Supreme Court and tutor to Princess Julia, sister of the queen. Apparently, Diogo is worldly and is inoculated with the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance, for he is interested more in man than in God, and finds himself a stranger in the fanatical atmosphere of the court. But the storm begins to brew, the shadow of the memory of

his martyred parents, and his subsequent attendance at secret prayers of the Marranos is cast upon him. Diogo struggles; for a time he is swept by the fiery love of the Princess Julia who, like him, passes through a tragic conflict between her passionate Catholicism and her love for the handsome Marrano. She sins and does penance, loves and suffers. Finally the crisis breaks forth, fanaticism is kindled at Lisbon, Marranos' homes are raided and their secret is discovered. Many of them are arrested, some escape, among them Don Henriquez, the closest friend of Diogo, and Ferdinand, his foster father. Diogo is torn between Judaism and love for Julia, but when she tries to persuade him to accept the king's mission and go to Rome in order to obtain permission for the establishment of the inquisition in Portugal, the cords of love and worldly pleasures snap. His soul is freed from bondage. Like his beloved, he does severe penance, lashes his body with iron chains to atone for his sins; a new fire consumes his soul, that of religion and a desire to find God. He leaves Portugal and goes in search of Him. Diogo Pires is no more; Shlomoh Molko takes his place.

In the second volume, Molko is in Safed, that city in Palestine which at that period was saturated with mysticism, and was the seat of all leading Kabbalists. The air is filled with a consuming desire to commune with God and to delve into the secrets of the Kabbala, with a longing for redemption, and the invisible steps of the Messiah are heard by the numerous dreamers whose pale and emaciated faces tell of a life of asceticism, painful efforts to mortify the flesh, and to purify the soul. Molko breathes the air of Safed and bends his efforts in the same direction. He studies mysticism, fasts and prays, and makes the acquaintance of the leader of the initiates, the famous Joseph Karo, who urges him on in his painful way to the heights. This extreme ascetic points out to him mortification and deadening of all pleasure as the only road to salvation. But again something goes wrong; Molko seeks not only to know God but to love Him. He exchanged the love of woman for that of the *Shekinah*, but he does not find it in Safed. A vestige of sin still remained in the sanctified air of the city, for keen observation of his colleagues, members of the initiated circle, reveals to him dark spots in their lives, carnal desires, and succumbing to the passion of the flesh. He himself is not altogether purified. It dawns upon him that his way is not right. He ran away from Christianity to the God of Judaism, but he returned to the way of his former

teachers, the monks—mortification. He turns again to search the way of love of his people, and urged on by the words of Don Henriquez, his former friend whom he found in Safed, he goes forth to preach to his suffering brethren the hope of redemption, to kindle in them the fire of Messianism, the consuming desire to return to Palestine. He knows that this will lead to martyrdom, but he is ready to sacrifice himself for his love of Israel.

In the third volume, called *ha-Korban* (The Sacrifice), we find Molko in Germany. He visits German cities, preaches fiery sermons and awakens in the heart of the Jews the dormant desire for Palestine. He enchants them, arouses dreams and visions, and a mass movement to emigrate to Palestine ensues. But he also arouses hatred on the part of the sober-minded Jews who consider his mission dangerous for it brings expulsions in its wake. The scene is primarily laid in Russheim. His mission there also worries the Jews, and he is attacked by them but is protected by his admirers, especially by the women. Molko, who is on the last leg of his road of struggle and who has almost attained pure spirituality, is even here not entirely free from thoughts of sin which spring up involuntarily as a final revenge of the mortified flesh. He approaches his goal. In company with David Reubeni (Vol. II, Sec. 138), strange ambassador of the Arabian Jews, he appears before Charles the Fifth to plead the case of the Jews, whereupon he is seized and condemned to be burned at the stake, which sacrifice he accepts cheerfully. Even at the very threshold of death he is assailed by doubts that perhaps his whole life was one great error. His former friend of the Lisbon court days, Duarte de Paz, whom he meets once more at Charles' court at Regensburg attempts to dissuade him from his dangerous visit to Charles. De Paz, who was also a Jew by birth but who chose a different road and apparently remained a Christian, says to him, "I remained a heretic at heart, but you, in spite of all endeavors are a Christian. Nay, your view of life and death is not Jewish, the passion for martyrdom, to redeem the sin of Israel by death is not the Jewish way. To live and struggle is the right path. Molko, thou art still the pupil of the monks." Shlomoh defends himself weakly, but something tells him it is true. Yet he goes to his destiny.

The trilogy, which extends over more than six hundred pages, is rich in many complicated episodes and is presented with great skill. It also abounds with fine portrayals of characters who participate in the

grand drama. Special emphasis is laid upon the nobility of the women who come into the life of Molko. They are all tragic characters, for they love and suffer for his sake. In spite of the apology of the author, the number of deviations from historical truth are not many nor great. The principal deviation is in the second volume where Kabak has Molko meet Joseph Karo in Safed, while the actual meeting took place in Salonica as Karo settled in Safed only after the death of the former.

The value of the book, however, lies, besides the unfolding of the struggle in Molko's soul, in the penetration of the spirit of the period. Kabak succeeded in portraying Jewish life in the sixteenth century both in Safed and in the German ghetto of Russheim in a remarkable way. There is both pathos and beauty in his description of the observance of the Sabbath as well as other scenes of Jewish life in these two cities distant from each other not only in space but also in spirit. There flits before us the exotic picture of the ecstatic reception of the Sabbath by the circle of visionaries among the mountains surrounding Safed, succeeded by that of the stately and solemn celebration of that day in Russheim where the rays of the light of the Sabbath only scatter the gloom but do not banish it. We are enthused with the Kabbalists and sympathize with the sorrow-laden German Jews whose woe penetrates even the mantle of cheer of Queen Sabbath. These and similar descriptions carry and transport us into another world from which we emerge with a heavy heart but also with exultation.

In the novels which deal with contemporary life, Kabak does not centralize upon giving expression to one idea or group of ideas as he did in his historical trilogy, but fragments of the very same thoughts serve as important motives even in them. In almost all of his novels of this type there is revealed to us the close relation between love and suffering, and we are told, directly or indirectly, that happiness which results from love consists in giving to others and in serving them, and similarly we have glimpses of the struggle of man against his own animalism and his stumblings and failures. These ideas, as said, are expressed not in concentrated form but in a scattered manner among a mass of episodes and actions all of which reflect the disorganized and somewhat confused life of the younger generation of East-European Jews during the second decade of the century. Most of his novels of this type deal with life in the Diaspora, but the last novel in three parts, *Ben Yam u-Ben Midbar* (Between the Sea and the Desert) portrays

the life in Palestine during the years immediately preceding the War and the War proper. In fact, the name is symbolic of the content, for Palestine lies between the sea and the desert.

It is not a novel in the true sense of the word though the author labels it a romance and though the story of the life of one of the characters, that of Miriam Weiss, runs through all three parts. She is really not the heroine of the novel but is used more as a device to unite the various episodes presented. The book is in reality a mosaic in miniature, a series of pictures of the life of the pioneers of the *Second Aliyah* joined together, often quite loosely, into a group portrait.

The *Second Aliyah* is the name usually given to the influx of immigrants into Palestine in the years 1910-1914. These were years of suffering for the Jews of Russia, and confusion reigned especially in the camp of the younger generation. Many of them, having been disappointed with the socialistic movement or the striving for political freedom which failed on the very point of realization, were in search of an ideal and turned to Palestine as a place suitable for a novel experiment, to begin a more noble and exalted life than hitherto lived. Others turned to the same land merely to fill their emptiness and to satisfy their romantic strivings for the performance of great deeds. A smaller number among them really strove to find in Palestine an exit from the abnormal situation of the Jew in the Russian Diaspora, and strove to be rooted to a place and to grow into a soil. The general slogan was: "Let us rebuild a desolate land by toil and labor and revive the Jewish people and realize the national ideal."

Soon, however, disappointment came; conditions in Palestine at the time were not suitable for successful colonization on a large scale. The older colonists looked with suspicion upon the new laborers and a gulf was created between the two. In addition, many used to a more cultured life in Europe could not stand the primitive conditions of the land. As a result, despair reigned among the pioneers; some left the land, some stayed and struggled but with despair in their hearts, and only a few idealists continued their fruitful work.

It is this state of affairs, already portrayed by Brenner in dark colors, that is described in Kabak's book, but in brighter colors and with greater art and sympathy.

The characters are numerous and of all types; some of them are aimless drifters; others are quasi-idealists whose noble strivings vanish before a test of hardship. Several, however, undergo in the course of

the story a change of heart; bitter disappointments turn them into idealists. Such is Miriam Weiss who came to Palestine to satisfy her romantic longing for grand deeds. She is disappointed and stumbles into an illicit love affair, but through the suffering which the war entails, she emerges purified. In general, the author seems to tell us that all Jews have ideal strivings but they are often stunted and thwarted by the abnormality of the conditions of their life. This is their heritage. The idea is symbolized by the character of Ziner, a German Jewish artist, and Ayala Karmelit, a Palestinian born girl, who are in love with each other. Ziner is deeply religious and devoted to Jewish tradition. He came to Palestine partly because of Ayala whom he met in Berlin and partly out of longing for the Holy Land. He begins work on two statues, Golgotha and Moriah, the first to symbolize Christianity and the second Judaism. He uses as a model Ayala who is his counterpart, pleasure-loving, irreligious, and egoistic, though she loves him deeply. He, however, believes that these traits are only the external shell and that her real self is different, and in the statue of Moriah he reveals her soul, representing her poorly dressed, bent by sorrow, and looking towards a distant, bright horizon. The subsequent events proved his belief. The War came and Ayala was called to do her share in the liberation of Palestine by a group of Palestinian youths led by her brother who saw in the English conquest a solution to the Jewish problem. Her task is the most dangerous as she acts as a spy for the enemy. She is apprehended and commits suicide. Thus in spite of her external character she showed the real mettle of her soul and made the supreme sacrifice on the altar of what seemed to her the happiness of her people. The War with its suffering brought about in general a great change in the life of all the characters which was hitherto wayward. The ideal of Efrosi, one of the characters who represents the noblest type in this motley group, to continue to work quietly on the land in spite of obstacles and build up a new life step by step, takes root in the hearts of many and they all look towards the distant future. Thus the novel or the group of stories ends. Several of the characters, especially Ayala and her brother, Samuel Karmelit, are taken from real life in spite of the author's avowal in his prefatory note to the contrary. On the whole, the novel presents a fair and accurate picture of the complicated drama of Jewish life in Palestine in trying days.

22. M. KIMḤI, ASHER BARASH AND ABIGDOR MEIRI

i. Another prolific Palestinian writer is M. Kimḥi. His first collection of several long stories named *Ahrit* (The End) appeared in 1918, and was followed by the novels: *Ma'aborot* (Transition); *Emesh* (Yesterday); *Al Shibah Yamim* (On Seven Seas); and a collection of short stories called *Sippurim* (Stories). All the novels with the exception of *Ma'aborot* deal with the life of the recently immigrated young Jews and Jewesses into Palestine. However, the life portrayed there can hardly be called Palestinian, for only the actions and episodes take place in that land, but the content and the personalities of the characters are reflections of the life of the younger generation in the lands of the Diaspora. Kimḥi is primarily a writer who gives expression to the life of the contemporary Jewish youth, those men and women who had emancipated themselves almost completely from the town with its traditions and who had gone in search of new ways or rather were swept by various forces into them, but found neither happiness nor satisfaction. The stormy days of the second and third decades of this century shattered many of their hopes and strivings and their life became fragmentary and confused, with no definite purpose except for an indefinable striving for personal happiness. A number of these people, stirred on by the memories of their childhood which was saturated with Jewish traditions and lured by the glamor of the new life in Palestine, emigrate thither and attempt to adjust themselves to new ideas and a life of labor, but are disappointed. All this is not new; we meet those types in Brenner's and Kabak's stories, but with certain differences. The other writers gave an ideal coloring to these adjustments, whether of a darker or brighter hue and there are problems, both general and individual, in their stories, with which the characters struggle in various ways. In Kimḥi's stories, this element is missing. Most of his characters, especially the women, have only their individual problems, or rather one problem—love.

Love, then, is the principal theme of our author. However, it is not the higher type of love that is presented but primarily passionate, physical love. His characters in most of his novels, with the exception of *Al-Shibah Yamim*, are all nervous, tragic, and with a strong desire for the satisfaction of the erotic. The women always cry, not because of the tragic events but because of unsatisfied eroticism. The young men always sigh and stalk about like shadows because of secret or un-

requited love. Strangely enough, the youths fall in love with women much older than themselves, women who somehow manage to retain their beauty even at the twilight of their youth. The author draws a halo of tragedy around his characters but does not arouse our sympathy, for passion and eroticism are projected through that veil. Thus, Zina, one of the leading characters of the novel, *Emesh*, does not love her husband whom she married after he had divorced his Christian wife. She sends her son, Elyasha, to Palestine. Being an idealist, he enters a *Kebuzah* where he is killed in a tussle with Arabs. Zina then leaves her husband, comes to the *Kebuzah*, and is apparently shocked by the tragedy which is aggravated at the sight of the young woman whom her son loved and who became insane after his death. This, however, does not prevent the mother from becoming entangled in a series of illicit love affairs, first with a *Halutz*, then with a writer in Jerusalem, and finally with a young Levantine Jew. She is not even disturbed when her first lover goes insane, but tragedy enters when her love life is ended. All the characters, however, are not of the same type, though they are all inoculated with a passion for love. A number of them are presented as of nobler character. The redeeming feature in Kimhi is that his novels, like Kabak's, are really groups of stories and there are no heroes or heroines but many characters whose vicissitudes are described. We thus get a checkered picture of that life which he endeavors to describe. Some of his characters, though on the whole minor ones, arouse in us great sympathy by the pathos of their lives. Of such nature are Matilda Zeef and several other Jews from Jerusalem. Matilda was a Moravian Jewish girl whose parents were already converts to Christianity and who was raised in a convent, but a mystic feeling aroused in her a desire to discard the past and set off for Palestine where she entered a *Kebuzah* and tried to find content in life.

Our author also distinguishes himself by his skilful narrative and fine technique in portraying the inner state of the soul of his characters, their feelings and emotions. All these possess human interest but do not arouse our admiration for this type of pioneers.

The best of his novels is *Al Shibah Yamim*, his last production. Here we breathe a different atmosphere. The life described is that of the immigrants of the *Second Aliyah*, their aspirations, and their struggles before and during the War. The tragic character of Hayyim Glick, the Galician *Yeshibah Bahur*, who came to Palestine as a *Halutz* and whose life was blasted by an unfortunate love affair, the healthy

and ideal characters of Jacob Spun and Simon Krup who came to rebuild Palestine by hard labor and complete devotion arouse our interest in that new life on the shores of the Mediterranean. The love of Hayyim, though a prohibited one, for he was married and had not been divorced, is not the passionate love depicted in the other novels of our author but a noble and ideal one, almost mystical, a love which elevates him. Likewise Gideon, the son of Hayyim, born in Palestine who grows into a strong youth rooted in the soil of the land and who devotes his knowledge—he is an agronomist—and ability to the development of a new healthy life, charms us by his contrast to the types portrayed in the other novels. Attractive is also Abraham Lachman, the Jerusalem landlord, who sympathizes with the aspirations of the pioneers and helps them greatly in their undertakings. The two negative characters, Avigdor Spectrow and Hina Shalit, typify in their wasted lives and their tragic ends the havoc wrought by the radical movements in Russia in the ranks of Jewish youth. In this novel, Kimhi atoned for the rather repellent life portrayed in the others. Of value is also the description of the suffering of the Jewish Jerusalem during the War which is portrayed with sympathy. Some of Kimhi's shorter stories are distinguished by penetration into the human soul.

ii. The scene changes entirely with Asher Barash, for though he lives in Palestine, his stories do not touch upon the life around him. He carries us back to old Galician Jewry and to the life of a generation ago, when Jews believed implicitly in their God, were permeated with a sense of piety and duty, and adjusted themselves to their environment. In Barash's stories there are no problems to solve, no psychological crises and no conflicts of the soul. Life, as reflected in many of his stories, is pervaded by an atmosphere of inner peace and the struggle of the consequent tragedies which result from it is mainly external. Barash is primarily an artist in description. He observes life and portrays it not only in detail but with special coloring which adds to it a kind of charm and turns the simple life of a Galician Jewish family into an idyll.

Of such a character is his story, *Temunot mi-Bet Mibshal ha-Shekar* (Portraits of a Brewery), where the life of a rich Jewish family is presented. The head of the family is a woman, Hannah Aberdas, who farms from the Count Molodezki the brewery situated in a small Galician town. She engaged in the business after the death of her husband, and the story is therefore preceded by her tale of her husband

who was not only a pious man but a saint according to her. She carried his memory all through life, though she remarried. The manufacture of beer was the only industry of the town and Hannah was the richest person in the community and the employer of both Jews and Gentiles. The writer unfolds before us the life in and around the beer factory, for the dwellings of the owner and the family were near it. We follow the vicissitudes of the family, their marriages, births, and ultimately deaths. We sense the peace that reigns in that corner of human life, the amity between the Gentile employees and their Jewish employer, the genuine relation between fellow-beings, and are touched by the final tragedy which overtakes that family. The tragedy lies in the taking away from Hannah the lease of the brewery by the new agent of the Count. This event strikes the head of the family and her numerous dependents like a storm. It uproots them from the soil where they had struck root for so many years, yet Hannah, in her faith and submission to the divine will, is only bent but not broken, and adjusts herself in her old age to a poor but noble life. The story contains numerous episodes and portraits of many who play more or less important roles in its development. But all these miniature pictures are united by the writer in one harmonious panorama which charms us by its idyllic character and moves us by its pathos.

His short stories collected in a volume and entitled *Sippurim* also contain these qualities but in a less marked degree. They tell of episodes either in the childhood of the author or in the lives of other people. There are also attempts at psychological analysis. Of such a character are the stories, *Meite*, *The Life of Baruch Wilder*, and *Aksoryut* (Cruelty). The first describes the awakening of passion in a half-witted woman, Meite; the second, the realization which suddenly seizes a bookworm, a man wholly immersed in abstract thought, of the futility of his life; and the third, the peculiar pleasure which a peasant finds in committing acts of cruelty. He is far from cruel by nature, but the death of his wife and children have poisoned his soul and these occasional acts of cruelty serve as a safety valve for his protests against his fate and destiny. These tales are presented by the author with art and sympathy. The stories of Barash are also distinguished by a fine narrative technique and flowing style tinged with lyricism.

iii. We experience another change of scene in the stories of Abigdor

Meiri who is both poet and short story writer. His specialty is life on the battle-field, in the trenches, and behind the front with all the human tragedies it implies. Although we have all heard about the War and read of its terrors and horrors, no one can feel the depth of the tragedies which took place in those years of struggle, the debasement of human nature which was revealed in its most hideous form as the one who had himself lived through those days of madness. Meiri, who was an Hungarian, served in the War in the Austrian army. Years after he awakened from the nightmare, he penned his experiences in a number of volumes under the general title, *Sippuré Milhamah* (War Stories). The individual volumes in the series bear such names as *ha-Shigaon ha-Gadol* (The Great Madness); *Shamayyim Adumim* (Red Sky); *Keshet Yakob* (The Bow of Jacob); and *be-Shem Rabbi Yeshu mi-Nazaret* (In the Name of Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth).

War not only brings out the beast in man but makes him the most dangerous of beasts, for all other animals kill only to satisfy their natural appetites, while man makes of killing a profession and science, and this calls forth the lowest instincts and gives them a perverse expression. Cruelty becomes a sport and torture of fellow-beings a past-time. There is no wonder then that hatreds which in times of peace are sometimes stifled by civilized man and covered up, break forth in their ugliest nakedness in war. Jew hatred was, of course, no exception, and it revealed itself not behind the front where soldiers committed atrocities on peaceful citizens, but on the front, in the trenches, where Jew and Gentile fought and died together. On the other hand, the nearness of death, the constant facing of the end also engender in men faith, piety, and frequently superstition. The rationality of the civilized man disappears or recedes for the moment and in its place there emerges the primitive soul of man which gropes in the dark and is impressed by any trivial matter. All these changes in human nature and soul are portrayed to us by Meiri in his stories, which though dealing primarily with the Jewish phase of that life, illumine grimly the entire panorama. They, however, do not fail to emphasize the nobler side of Jewish life in time of war, the idealism of the Jewish soldiers, the deep faith, the complete trust in God that the many *ex-Yeshibah Bahurim* and respected members of Jewish communities in Galicia, now donned in Austrian uniforms, displayed amidst the withering fire of cannon, and the groans of the wounded, and the last sighs of the dying.

The very first story, *Torat ha-Ksaratin* (The Religion of the Barracks) introduces us into an atmosphere of war and reveals to us its deadening effect upon the human soul. The corporal is endeavoring to instill into the minds and hearts of a group of tyros, mostly Jews, and all of them professionals and intellectuals, the duties of a soldier in war. Its first principle or article of creed is discipline, that discipline which deprives man of all human feeling and makes him a machine, obeying only one will, that of his superiors, and is deadlier than the rifle or the bayonet; the discipline which negates all suffering and orders the soldier to endure misery and pain mechanically. In war, continues the corporal, there is only one purpose, to strike, to kill, and to destroy the enemy. There is no thought, feeling, or emotion; there is but one reality—death. He talks with enthusiasm of the glory of a heroic death on the field of battle. The enthusiasm, however, is more feigned than real. Suddenly the boom of a cannon is heard, the voice of the corporal is silenced, and when the smoke disperses, he lies there torn and mangled and his parting words still ring in the ears of the soldiers, “one reality, that is death.”

Human brutality, suffering and religious ecstasy are portrayed in the story *Menorat ha-Maor ha-Hayya* (The Living Candlestick). The Magyar lieutenant, Stunya, hates sergeant Hayyim Joseph David, the *ex-Yeshibah Bahur* for being a Jew, for his piety, and above all for his endurance of misery with equanimity, nay even with a religious ecstasy. He asks him, “Why are you happy?” To which Joseph answers, “Because suffering purifies man.” Astounded and aroused to brutality he murmurs, “I will soon purify you.” He does not have to wait long. Hanukkah comes and David lights the candles in the trench. The lieutenant accuses him of giving signals to the enemy and invents a devilish form of punishment. He orders David to dip his fingers in burning pitch and then lights them. While the soldier writhes in pain the lieutenant looks on with pleasure. David suffers but murmurs the benediction over the Hanukkah candles nonetheless, for he considers the cruel act a punishment for his neglecting to light the candles at the proper time. Episodes of still greater cruelty and suffering and hatred are told in other stories, among them in the one entitled *be-Shem Rabbi Yeshu mi-Nazeret* wherein is related how on Christmas Day Russian officers forced a Jewish Austrian soldier to drink the blood of a fellow-Jew and were about to bury alive another Jewish captive and a Magyar soldier who took the part of the sufferer. The Magyar begged the

Jew to teach him a Hebrew prayer before his death for he was ashamed of his Christianity. He taught him the *Shema*, but then the cannons began to roar and the Russians fled with the exception of the cruel officer whom the Magyar stabbed to death with savage fury.

Exceptionally touching is a story, *Komez Adamah* (A Handful of Dust). Battles rage, rain streams down in torrents, icy winds blow, the mud becomes stickier and stickier, and the soldiers attired in heavy military outfits tramp and tramp for days without rest, without food, and without sleep. Their backs are bent under the heavy burden of gun and reserve pack and ammunition. To lighten the burden, they begin to throw things out of the pack, among them articles of clothing, even food and ammunition. Only one soldier, an elderly Jew carries his burden and suffers. When a halt is declared and inspection begins his is the only full pack. He is praised by the corporal, but suddenly he notices a little sack filled with earth. "What is this," roars the corporal? "Earth," murmurs the Jew. He is not understood and is brought before a higher officer. He explains that it is earth from *Erez Yisrael* which is placed by pious Jews under the head of the dead and that he carries it with him for the time of his death. When he is examined, it is found that his body is bruised and that blood flows from his shoulders where the straps of the pack had sunk into the flesh. "In case the Jew dies," says the officer to the corporal, "place the bag of earth under his head." The bruised soldier, however, turns to his fellow Jew and murmurs, "He will not live to do it."

Such outbursts of deep religious piety in the midst of war and destruction are the themes of many of the stories. In one of them, *Lel Shemurim*, we are presented with a scene in which an old Jewish soldier together with his four sons disobey the order of the major and instead of attacking the enemy observe the Seder in the trenches, unaware of the punishment awaiting them. And when the major enters the trench, he sees them calmly reading the Haggadah. The sudden death of the major saves them from execution. In another, *Tefilloto Shel Shlomeh Held* (The Prayer of Solomon Held), a rabid Jewish radical turns superstitious under the strain of war and the general madness. Shlomeh faces the colonel with his hat turned backwards; when ordered to set it right, he refuses because it was with his hat in that particular position that he was saved from a bursting shrapnel. The colonel does not punish him for he himself has a pet superstition, holding his right hand closed had once saved him from disaster. One

day Shlomeh urges his fellow Jews in the trenches to organize a *Minyon* for Rosh ha-Shanah which he thought due. Since there were not ten Jews in the trench, he included the non-Jews, but through ignorance, he recited the morning prayer in the evening. When this error is disclosed he is not dismayed, for prayer to God is the essential thing not the particular prayer. Worse things happen. It is discovered that Rosh ha-Shanah had already passed, and then Shlomeh is disturbed. He feels it is an evil omen and that his end is near. His fear comes true.

Thus the author goes on and there pass before us episodes one more gruesome than the other followed by moments of religious exaltation and the rise of the spirit of man above all physical suffering. The stories of Meiri are stirring portraits of the human soul at its worst and at its best. They deserve translation in many languages and in fact a number of them have been translated, but unfortunately in an abbreviated form, as they were censored by military authorities.

23. SAMUEL JOSEPH AGNON

The tendency on the part of a number of Palestinian writers to turn from the life of their own generation and search for themes and motives for their stories in the Jewish life of a generation or two ago, found its fullest expression in the stories of Samuel Joseph Agnon (1888). This comparatively young writer is very prolific and his numerous stories which were recently collected (1935) fill six volumes, and almost all of them, with few exceptions, tell of a world which in spirit is far distant from that in which we all live and move. It borders on the Mediaeval, nay it is Mediaeval in essence though not in time. Agnon, who like Barash and Kimḥi, hails from Galicia and who is saturated with a deep sense of piety and a glowing emotion of religiosity, undertook to perpetuate, for the sake of the future generations, the inner life, or rather the soul of the inner life, of Galician Jewry as it existed two or three generations ago. We said the soul of the inner life of Galician Jewry, but it is not quite correct, for only the color, the canvas, the external garment is Galician, while the essence of the spirit belongs to all East-European Jewries of that period.

The world to which Agnon introduces us was one which harbored faith, which generated its own light, illuminated the darkness of material want, and aroused trust and hope which assuaged the pangs of disease and alleviated suffering. It was complete and harmonious

for there was no doubt or hesitation, no conflicts of emotion, only the peace of an elemental belief in a God who watches over those who trust in Him. It was, of course, narrow and circumscribed, but this limitation was compensated by depth of emotion. Occasionally the calm and peace were disturbed by struggles arising from the lure of the material, for the denizens even of this world were no angels but men subject to the evil *Yetzer*, but the equilibrium was soon restored and peace reigned once more in their souls.

It would, however, be wrong to assume that this world was entirely circumscribed by belief and trust in God. Faith in the Creator, who is always present and whose ever-seeing eye watches over the fate and destiny of His faithful worshippers, was a very important element in this world, but did not fill it entirely. Judaism is not a religion of belief only. It does not save by faith alone. It has other elements which, when compared with God, are of secondary importance, yet their force is almost as powerful as the belief in Him. Besides God there is the Torah, and next to it is Israel, for the three, as the ancient adage has it, are one. The light of the Torah which penetrated into the darkest corners of Jewish life equalled in its illumination the beacon of belief in the Godhead. Study brought both comfort and glory to the scholar and the crown of Torah was the noblest. Nor was the love of Israel lacking in strength; its glow warmed the hearts and its external expression in the form of charity to the needy brought comfort and rest to the weary, wandering beggars who often found shelter and food in the huts of the poorest of the poor. To these there was added another ray of light which flashed across the dark horizon of the life of the poor and humble—the love for *Eretz Yisrael*. It was not the nationalistic love of today, but the ideal; the love for a land which was saturated with holiness; a land which, though distant and desolate, was yet so near and perfect; a land in the proprietorship of which every Jew participated potentially; a land the habitation of which purified and cleansed the souls of its inhabitants of all sin. That love was often dormant, but it was there, nestling deep in the soul of the Jew of that time. It was both love and hope for *Eretz Yisrael*; it symbolized the redemption, the ultimate emergence from the *Galut*. These then were the four pillars of the world whose soul Agnon attempts to delineate in his stories.

This world in which all the Jews participated and which enveloped their inner selves, and was the source of their strength through the ages, was not always visible in real life. It was often covered with the dust

and mire of poverty and the struggle for existence. All shared in it, but not all were denizens in it. Only the select, whose number was by no means small, reflected it in their lives to a great extent, and it is the world of these which is projected by Agnon through the characters of his stories. Yet these characters are not individuals but types and representatives, or concentrated images of a world which existed, though it was only occasionally revealed.

However, there were many writers before Agnon who depicted one or more phases of the inner world of the Jews. Perez, Berdichewski, and others endeavored to transmit to us the essence of Hassidism, its religious glow and emotional ecstasy. Others wrote of the love of the Torah, and still others revealed to us another corner of Jewish life illumined by that inner light. All these portrayed that life only partially, and while in their special field some of them delved deep into the recesses of the Jewish religious soul, it was left for Agnon to give a composite representation of the spirit of the complete inner Jewish life and in this lies his excellence. This, however, is not all; his work is much enhanced by the form in which he portrays to us that life. Like Mendele, with whom he has much in common, he feels that the expression of the life of a whole group needs a form different than that of the ordinary narrative, but unlike the former, he did not assume the burden himself and did not impersonate the traveling observer, but rather left it to types who were created and fashioned by the folk-mind itself. The reason is obvious; Mendele portrays the external life and habits of the Jews and for this the *Moker Seforim*, the traveling observer is the most suitable character. Agnon is the painter of the inner life, and needs, therefore, other travelers of a different stamp and nature. He went, therefore, to the legend, to the folk-story, and the popular tale and made these his means of expression, and the ideal men and women of these folk productions his characters. It is not Agnon that tells the story, for he is entirely in the background, he merely manipulates the collected material, joins story to story, tale to tale in a dexterous way and almost unawares a strange multi-colored picture rises before our eyes.

He did not have to go very far in search of his exotic form. It is all there in Mediaeval Jewish literature, in the *Tahkemoni* of Ḥarizi (Vol. I, Sec. 203), in the *Book of Delight* of Zabara (Vol. I, Sec. 202), in the *Meshal ha-Kedmoni* of Sahula (Vol. II, Sec. 159), in the *Prince and Derwish* of Ibn Ḥasdai, and many more, partly even in the Midrash and

in the ethical books where parables and stories are found in abundance. It is not even particularly Jewish, for the whole Oriental narrative literature of which the Arabian Nights is the Classic example displays that same quaintness.

Still, there is originality and inventiveness in the form used by Agnon, for he has produced remarkable tales with the peculiar flavor of the ethical and pietistic books. The Mediaeval Jewish tale, as is plain from the books mentioned above, was primarily secular; at best there was a moral point to the stories; those of Agnon are mainly pious and religious. The combination, therefore, is his own, but he succeeds in endowing it with all the grace of the former literature, even to the extent of ending each tale with a rhymed couplet or two, and the insertion of poems in the midst of the narrative. The style suits the form. It closely resembles that of the Midrash and the pietistic books for it contains numerous quotations from the Talmud and many Agadic books, with references to chapters and sections, yet it is new for there is a modern tinge to it and a lyric flavor. In general, both the content and style are really difficult to describe in detail. Suffice it to say that both are mosaics consisting of parts of different color and texture, combined skilfully, though not perfectly, into one harmonious whole.

Agnon wrote many short stories in which the inner world which he undertook to portray in its various manifestations is revealed to us and in which his quaint artistic form is employed. But all these qualities, both of content and form, are given to us in as complete a manner as possible in his long story of two volumes entitled *Haknosat Kalah* (literally the Dowry of the Bride). It was translated into English under the title *Bridal Canopy*, a title probably euphuistic but not entirely correct. It is not a story in the usual sense of the word nor even a series of stories for there is no plot nor development of events and episodes, but a kind of magic pattern woven together from tales, parables, fables, proverbs, and other folkloristic material. It is a quaint epic telling what the wandering hero, Yudel Hassid, saw and experienced in his journeyings through the cities of Galicia. He sees much but hears more, and here the skein rolls on, a tale within a tale, story within a story; fable follows fable, and parable succeeds parable, and all together form a comprehensive, though loosely connected scene.

Yudel, the hero, is no Don Quixote although some critics seek to describe him as such¹² and there is little evidence of influence by Cer-

¹² See F. Liachower, S. J. Agnon, in *Rishonim ve-Aharonim*.

vantes on Agnon. His prototype is rather Heber ha-Keni, the principal character of Ḥarisi's *Tahkemoni* (Vol. I, Sec. 204) who travels, meets people, tells and hears stories. The atmosphere however is entirely different. It is saturated with holiness, piety, and all the ingredients of that world we described. Yudel himself embodies the essential characteristics of that inner soul of Jewry which Agnon attempts to delineate. His personality is illuminated by the light of God's presence and is filled by it. He is wholly enveloped in the study of the Torah and would not have undertaken his journey in order to collect a dowry for his three marriageable daughters were it not for the persistent urging of his wife and still more because of the fact that the act in itself is a *Mizwah*, a fulfillment of the word of God. Equally strong is his love for the Jews and no less is his longing for Palestine. These essential qualities are developed and grow to their full ideal form and intensity during the travels, and are augmented by the different types with whom he comes in contact and are reflected in many colors and brilliance by the stories. The more Yudel travels, the more these qualities of the spirit become projected and stand out in bold relief. Impressed by the beauty of nature which is revealed to him while traveling slowly in the wagon of Note the driver, he asks himself the question, "Why does a man need two eyes? Could he not see the world with one eye? Behold there are many people who have only one eye and yet their sight suffices for their needs." His answer is that man is created with two eyes so that with one he might observe the greatness of God and with the other his own humbleness. On another occasion, Yudel goes to sleep in a dark room, and before he falls asleep a discussion arises among his organs. Say the hands, "Is it possible for a Jew to go to sleep without studying the Torah?" The feet complain then that they have no strength to stand up. The eyes come to their assistance and say, "Of what avail would it be to rise when there is no light and we cannot see?" The tongue then takes the part of the hands and says, "Light or no light, a Jew is never free from the study of the Torah." An episode in Yudel's travels illustrates how deep-seated the love of the Torah was in the heart of the Jew. He and Note the driver come into a village at night. It is dark and with the exception of the barking of the dogs no sound is heard. Suddenly Yudel exclaims that he hears a voice as of one studying. The simple Note tells him that it is an hallucination but Yudel persists. They draw up before a peasant hut, the sight of which, as swine

wallow in the dust before his eyes, would seem to indicate that it is a Gentile's house and belie Yudel's assertion. He persists, however, and enters the house, and to his question as to who is studying, the peasant woman answers, "My husband." Yudel finds out that he is a Jew who had embraced Christianity many years ago and that he had left behind him all except the study of the Torah. Night after night he studies the Talmud in the low peasant hut surrounded by the sacred paintings on the walls.

The joy in worshipping God even while suffering the pangs of poverty and the willingness to share the last morsel with a poor man is typified by many episodes and stories. Yerahmiel the Melamed, who collected pennies for years in order to buy a cow for his home to serve as a means of *Parnasah*, lends his money to Yehiel, the inn-keeper, to enable him to pay his rent and to save his house and business. He rejoices in the act for he gave his money not to Yehiel but to God. Again, we meet Yeshuah Eliezer, a poor man, who lives in a cellar and whose only meal consists of a pot of potatoes, who yet forces Yudel to partake of his hospitality, for he never eats unless he has a guest. At the other end, we have the rich Rabbi Ephraim who is known for his hospitality, for he too does not eat on the day he has no guests and it is his custom to pay the poor for their kindness in sharing his meal.

The love for Palestine is likewise illustrated by several meetings of Yudel with persons who live in the *Galut* and yet are in heart and mind really in the Holy Land. As a result a great longing seizes him and he decides to go there as soon as he marries off his daughters. His goal, however, is still far off, for Yudel ceases to collect money for the dowry as soon as he has two hundred gulden, for according to the law, this sum disqualifies one from accepting charity. He stops at an inn and pursues the study of the Torah, but he is confident that he will succeed. Accordingly, he engages his daughter to the son of a rich man and promises twelve thousand gulden as dowry despite the fact that he possesses nothing. It ends well, however, for miraculously his wife finds a treasure and the wedding is celebrated with great pomp and all the people Yudel had met on his travels come to rejoice with him and bring presents. Thus ends the tale of the wanderings of Yudel.

The peculiar construction of the story, the legends and miracles all contribute to its weirdness and quaintness and endow it with a kind of

beauty and poetic quality which is rarely found elsewhere. This is enhanced by the typically Jewish spirit permeating it to such a degree that even the animals in the story partake of it. The rooster in Yudel's house is called Rabbi Zoraḥ, a name borrowed from a verse in Psalms, whose only purpose in life is to awaken his master to the worship of God. Note's horses who draw the wagon in which Yudel is driving are called *Mashkeni* (Draw Me) and *Naruzah* (Let Us Run), taken from Canticles Ch. 1, 4, symbolic names which also emphasize their contrary characteristics. Moreover, these horses are even more learned than Mendele's famous mare, and at times quote verses and hold discussions. The device is not new, as it was used in Mediaeval Jewish tales (Vol. II, Sec. 159), but it fits in harmoniously with the atmosphere in the story and adds to its quaintness. Yet, with all its quaintness and weirdness the story is not removed from the period in which it was supposed to take place. Although Jewish life still maintained its ancient integrity in the first half of the last century it was already penetrated by the spirit of Haskalah and a new age. These elements are reflected in the story. The external Jewish life is well portrayed and we get a fine glimpse of its details; the business of the Jews, their customs on various occasions, and even the food are described by the author quite minutely. The *Maskil*, of course, is not missing. We have Heshil, the enlightened, who urges the students of the *Yeshibah* to study the Hebrew language and above all, *Dikduk* (Grammar), for "*Dikduk* is the very foundation of human intelligence and exalts human life above that of animals." We thus have a fine sense of reality flashing through the atmosphere of legend, romanticism, and tale.

There are, though, grave defects in the story, for it is excessively monotonous, and the numerous tales, fables, and parables are but loosely connected, and in general, its content cannot be appreciated in its full beauty except by those who either themselves experienced some form of that life or are conversant with its essence. On the whole, however, this story, or, as some of the Hebrew critics insist on calling it, this epic is a work of art both in content and form, inasmuch as it really draws an aerial but distinct portrait of the spirit of the inner life of the Jews. Its characters are, of course, concentrated and composite incarnations of that spirit. Such Yudels were not frequent dwellers of the ghetto as the author himself states. The other characters were not very common either, but all of them did exist in the Galician Jewish community of a century ago, even if one had to sift

many towns to discover them. They are thus incarnations of an inner spirit which dwelt in the heart of large numbers of Jews in those days. It is not a Hassidic epic as some insist though it is colored with Hassidism, nor is it Galician except externally, for the essential qualities of the Jewishness depicted there were common to all Jews.

The great value of the form consists in the fact that Agnon succeeded in assimilating the lyricism of the Agada, the religious glow of the pietistic books of earlier ages, and the moral touch and exoticism of the Mediaeval Jewish tale, and the bell-like jingle of their rhymes, and presenting them to the readers of Hebrew in a modern garb, thus to a degree, preserving the spirit of that extensive literature.

Haknosat Kalah is Agnon's magnum opus, but as said, he wrote also many shorter stories. A number of them called by the general name *Polin* (Poland) delineate the soul of Polish Jewry. Of these the tales, *Or Torah* (The Light of the Torah) and *Agadat ha-Sofer* (The Legend of the Scribe) glorify the power of the Torah. Rabbi Asher Baruch, a leading member of the Jewish community of Kurukewki, is engrossed in the study of the Torah. Bent over the folio he stands with the candle between his fingers and studies night after night. When sleep closes his heavy eyelids, the candle burns low, and the flame reaches his fingers and Asher Baruch awakens again to his sacred task. This candle is the only light in town during the dark nights. It illumines the folio of Asher Baruch, but it also lights the way of the smugglers who bring their goods from across the border and find their way into town. But one night the candle burns no more, for Asher Baruch has departed this world; the smugglers lose their way that night, and they exclaim, "The Light of the town is extinguished," for Asher Baruch is dead.

In the *Legend of the Scribe* not only the love of Torah is glorified but also the pure love between husband and wife. Raphael, the scribe, was a saintly man. He sanctified himself many times in order to write the Holy name in the Scroll, and he was besought to write Scrolls by childless people who donated them to the synagogue in memory of their earthly life and testimony of their existence. Scroll after Scroll did Raphael write and he instilled in them his saintliness. But the time came when he had to write a Scroll for his own wife, Miriam, who alas, had died childless. The finest parchment, the best quills were prepared, and numerous sanctifications were performed by him for the writing of that Torah, but in vain, he could not write

it. Tears dimmed his eyes and the work did not progress. Only after much effort did the inspiration come so that he was able to finish the work. Out of his wife's wedding dress he made a cover for the Torah; and at the very moment he was bringing the Torah into the synagogue, he saw his wife in a vision; he heard the melody of his wedding march, and rushing to her with the Torah wrapped in her wedding dress in his arms, Raphael fell dead.

The deep and pure family love which was rooted in the heart of the pious for the sake of which they even sinned, sinned and suffered, is expressed in a story called *We-Hayah ha-Akub le-Mishor* (And the Crooked Shall be Straight). It is a detailed story about Menasseh Hayyim and his wife, Kraindel Charni, who were charitable and whose door was always open to the poor, but their fortune dwindled and poverty entered their home. They tried to keep it a secret until nothing was left, and the wolf became a frequent visitor in the house. Menasseh Hayyim obtained a letter from a leading Rabbi and went begging, but he was not successful in this pursuit. In a moment of weakness he sold his letter to a professional beggar and received a sum of money in order to return home, but in a like moment he drank an extra cup of wine and his money was stolen. He wandered on to obtain a fresh sum for the return home. Meanwhile the professional beggar died and was buried under the name of Menasseh Hayyim. The rumor reached his wife; she mourned long but finally remarried. When Menasseh Hayyim ultimately approached his town, he found out the truth. In spite of his piety he did not want to disturb her happiness. He thus remained a living dead man, though he suffered deeply, both at his ruined life, and at the consciousness of the grave sin in allowing a married woman to live with another man. He died of a broken heart. There are beautiful and stirring scenes in this story which portray the quiet and peaceful Jewish family life so strongly cemented by the bonds of love and genuine respect, the pathos of the moment when Menasseh Hayyim takes leave of his wife to depart on the thorny path of beggary, and the tragic struggle in his heart between the sense of sin and his love for his wife who now belongs to another.

The love for Palestine deeply seated in the heart of the Jew of former times is the theme of a number of Agnon's stories. In some, the leading motive is the longing and yearning of the pious Jew for the Holy Land; others deal with the tribulations the pilgrims ex-

perienced on their long journey; still others with the joy and exultation of these Jews when their life's ideal was realized and they actually breathed the balmy air of *Erez Yisrael* and stepped on its sacred soil. In all these stories, as in his *Haknosat Kalah*, the characters are concentrated incarnations of a folk ideal deeply rooted in the heart of every Jew, though not frequently expressed and realized. The form and style of the shorter stories are similar to those of the "epic," being steeped in the spirit of folklore and dyed in its colors.

Agnon also wrote a number of stories dealing with modern life. Most of these described Jewish life in Galicia before the War and some the life of the young generation in Palestine. The themes of the stories vary, that of love predominating. In these, as in all his writings, the writer is mainly interested in the exotic and in the romantic. Thus *di-Dmê Yomehah* (In the Noon of Her Life) is a tale of a young girl, Tirzah, who falls in love with a man who was her mother's lover before her marriage. Her mother died young, and though faithful to her husband she carried the dream of the love of her youth in her heart until the day of her death. The daughter, a child at the time of the death of her mother, realized, when she grew up, the tragedy of her mother's life. When she later met the man, who had remained unmarried, he had a peculiar attraction for her. The story is written in form of a diary by Tirzah who tells the vicissitudes of her life in an artistic manner. The same exotic strain, the expression of a soul longing for an ideal personality is evident too in his other love stories. It is not the passionate love which animates them, but the purer and nobler type of the communion of souls. One of the stories entitled *be-Nearenu u-we-Sekenenu* (Young and Old) portrays skilfully and with a touch of humor the early years of Zionist activity among the Galician Jewish youth.

Thus Agnon by his variety of expressions and especially by his originality of both content and form enriched modern Hebrew belletristics and added greatly to its essence and color.

Kindred in spirit to the works of Agnon but different in form and much less distinguished by originality and creativeness is the *Sefer ha-Ma'asot* (The Book of Stories) in four volumes by Mordecai ben Yeḥeskel. It is an extensive collection of folk stories about great scholars, saints, and pious men. Many of them are taken from old books and presented in modern garb but a large number are oral tales which were current among the Jews of Galicia from which country

the author hails. To these belong most of the Ḥassidic stories in which the *Besht*, the founder of the movement, plays an important role.

The stories and tales reflect the conception of the Jewish masses of a generation or two ago of right conduct and typifies their ideal heroes. They are grouped by the writer according to certain virtues, such as the study of the Torah, hospitality, redemption of prisoners falsely arrested, trials of chastity of pious women, bestowing of dowry on poor girls and kindred acts of piety.

Among the tales there is a legend which tells about the rise of the House of Rothschild. Once, runs the tale, a writer presented his manuscript to the famous Rabbi Zebi Ashkenazi, known as the *Ḥakam Zebi* (after the books of Responsa he composed, Vol. II, Sec. 70) who lived in Amsterdam at the time and asked for his approbation. The Gaon, after looking over the manuscript, granted his request. Later he discovered that the author belonged to the sect of Sabbatai Zebi, and being apprehensive lest the book also contain the teachings of the sect, for he had read only part of it, he set fire to the printing-house where the book was being printed and the manuscript was burned. As a result he had to flee from Amsterdam. Disguised as a poor wanderer he journeyed for days until he came to a village inn, the owner of which punctiliously observed the *Mizwah* of hospitality. He recognized in the wanderer a scholar and he kept him for many days in a separate room where the *Ḥakam Zebi* sat and studied. The Gaon was an irascible man and he often spoke harshly to the people of the house when their service did not please him. They complained but the owner pacified them and undertook to serve the guest himself. But the scholar also spoke sharply to the landlord. The pious man was silent for a long time until his patience was finally exhausted and he then said to the Rabbi, "I have served you with the best I have and in the friendliest manner, but if all this does not please the master, you are at liberty to seek another place." The Gaon answered, "Thou hast spoken properly, and even today I will leave thy house." That same day there came to the inn three old men as a delegation from the Lwow Kehillah to invite the *Ḥakam Zebi* of Amsterdam to the Rabbinical post in their community. The Gaon accepted the post and they rejoiced greatly. Before his departure he turned to the inn-keeper and said, "I know that I have sinned against thee and am asking for forgiveness and I give thee my blessing that thou shalt have riches and great prestige in the courts of princes and kings. This blessing shall

also rest upon thy children and children's children." The blessing was realized to its fullest extent for this inn-keeper became the founder of the Rothschild family.

Thus did the people embellish the rise of the House of Rothschild which for many years was the pride of the nation. Not the commercial keenness of Meir Anshel, nor the financial genius of his five sons was the cause of their remarkable rise, but the piety, humility, and devotion to the *Mizwah* of hospitality of their great grandfather. The stories are recast in a fine flowing Hebrew.

24. JUDAH BURLO, EBER HA-DANI, AND M. SMILANSKI

The Palestinian writers hitherto discussed are entitled to that appellation only because of their residence in that country. Their personality was developed and formed in the Diaspora, and as a result, their writings reflect only to a small extent the Palestinian life. But soon there arose a group of writers who were either nurtured on the soil of Palestine or who came when very young and devoted their talents exclusively to the portrayal of Palestinian and Oriental life, both of the old and the new.

i. The most typical of them is Judah Burlo (1888), a Sephardic Jew born in Jerusalem. Burlo is at present the only literary representative of Sephardic Jewry which in the period of its glory contributed so much to Jewish literature. For the last few centuries, due to the fact that the greater part of that Jewry lived in the Orient, it has sunk into a kind of stupor and contributed but little to modern Jewish life. It has taken slight interest in the spiritual and intellectual struggles of world Jewry during the last one hundred and fifty years and, with few exceptions, the Sephardic Jews have not participated in the national revival until recent years. Burlo's writings are the first signs of the awakening and modernization of Sephardic Jewry and of the new spirit born as a result of the influence of the European Jews upon their Oriental brethren.

Burlo, who is as prolific as many of his contemporaries, has the distinction of having revealed to the world a hitherto hidden corner of Jewish life, that of the Oriental or Sephardic Jews. In a series of short stories and novels he has portrayed the life of the contemporary generation of the younger Oriental Jews under the new conditions which European civilization has introduced into the East. In his pictures we see, on the whole, the degeneration of that once proud

Jewry which has lost much of its heritage and has not acquired the idealism, social feeling, breadth of education and vision of Western Jews. They have assimilated the Arab life and manners, but simultaneously have also adopted the lighter forms and modes of European civilization and thus their personality is a kind of amalgam of the East and West, or better still, of Jew, Arab, and European. In short, they represent a particular type of Jewish Levantine. Sephardic Jews in the Orient undoubtedly have preserved some of the beauty of Jewish life which was embodied in many types, but Burlo chose to select his characters primarily from the younger generation who had emancipated themselves from the traditions and beliefs of the race, not as the European Jews, through education and struggle for enlightenment, but through their desire for a life of pleasure. This quality is not always revealed but is often covered with a quasi-philosophy expressed in high-sounding phrases about life, love, individual freedom—all borrowed from current literature—but neither the philosophy nor the emancipation goes deep. While they seem to strive for freedom, they nevertheless display an ingrained belief in superstition, and they fail to divest themselves of their past. Some of them have, it appears, made a kind of compromise between their mechanical religion and their strange non-conventional life.

In his earlier novels, Burlo devotes himself to the portrayal of Oriental Jewish life before the War while it was as yet untouched by the national renaissance, but he describes that life indirectly. He endeavors to give to his works the character of problem novels and it is the life of his hero or heroine which is his main concern. These principal characters are individualists and their problems are primarily their own. Love is the main motive of the novels and the principal problem of the characters, and in their attempts to solve it, they rebel against their environment and conditions. The result is, of course, tragic; and it is this tragic strain which lends human interest to the stories.

In his first novel, *'Ishto ha-Senuah* (His Hated Wife), the vicissitudes of the marital life of Daud, a rich Sephardic Jew of Jerusalem, are presented. Daud married his wife at the advice of his mother rather than out of love. He was poor at the time, but after his marriage he began to accumulate riches. Like all superstitious Jews he believed it was his wife who brought him luck, yet his dislike for her grew from day to day. He longed for love and attempted to obtain

it in one way or another. He even had a paramour in Cairo but that did not satisfy him. He planned several times to divorce his wife, but was restrained lest he would lose his wealth. Finally, he obtained the consent of his wife to take a second one—which is not prohibited by Sephardic customs—but his son Albert who was educated in European fashion and whom he thought an ally, interfered. When his son left for America, he saw himself near his goal, but then the War broke out and conditions prevented him from carrying out his wish. After thirty years of struggle, he yielded to his fate and was reconciled to his wife. The struggle is well portrayed and the narrative is skilful. The author tries to inject a deeper note by making Daud wonder at God who created man and gave him a heart to desire and to love and yet prevents him from enjoying life. Doubt enters his heart that perhaps there is no guiding hand in the world. This note of wonder, of heretical doubts, of identifications of life and love runs through most of Burlo's novels. The quality of the book lies in its accurate portrait of Jewish life in pre-War Jerusalem.

The same motive is the basis of another novel, *Naftulé Adam* (The Wrestling of a Man). The scene is Damascus, and the hero Raḥmu, a Jewish merchant who is married but has a passion for love and beauty, and his attitude toward his wife is one of indifference, neither love nor hate. He flirts secretly with many Arab girls among the families of his friends and finally falls in love with an Arab beauty. The romance is cut short, however, by an act of punishment on the part of the relatives of her divorced husband who attack Raḥmu and blind him. The woman also falls sick and finally dies. Raḥmu suffers deeply, and finally, through the help of a wise Arab sage who attempts to cure both lovers, elaborates a philosophy of life which expresses rebellion against all conceived notions of religion. There is no sin. His love for a Moslem girl is not sinful for it is out of a desire for beauty which God Himself has planted in his heart. Evil is only a human product. Henceforth he disregards all bonds of custom and conducts himself according to his own inner light. One thing only does he consider holy—human life and happiness.

In the novel, *Merranenet* (The Singer), a new type of character is introduced. Bediah, a singer, a figure of the demi-world, a type not infrequent in the Orient, is a woman who has made a profession of love, but has covered it with a veneer of respectability. She has a paramour, a wealthy Arab Effendi, Rashid, to whom she seems to be

really attached. She is beautiful and wealthy and has great influence in official circles, for the highest officers of state are visitors in her salon. She sees no wrong in her ways, for like the others, she speaks of beauty and love as the essence of life, and does not even hesitate to persuade another young girl, her protégée, the daughter of a widow, to adopt her profession. She does not, however, rebel against Jewish tradition; on the contrary, she frequently donates oil to the synagogue and is generally charitable and generous to a number of poor families. Her relation to Jewish life, however, is more mechanical than personal. She is wholly engrossed in her own interests. Only after the War, when the whole fabric of her life is shattered and old Damascus is no more, does she settle in a Palestinian city. She is touched by the life of the *Ḥaluzim*, and marvels at the beauty and idealism of their life. These characters reflect to an extent a phase of the life of the Oriental Sephardic Jewry in pre-War times, which was the result of a stagnant tradition combined with assimilation to the Muslim environment and leavened by unbridled desires, though the author attempts to cover it with a veneer of philosophy and reflection.

The earlier novels deal with a limited phase of Oriental life, either in Jerusalem or Damascus, but in his novel, *Bat Zion*, in four volumes, Burlo employs a larger canvas which embraces the pre-War as well as the new pioneer life. It seems that his purpose is to contrast the stagnant religious life of old Jerusalem with the throbbing constructive life of new Palestine animated by a great national ideal. The theme is again the desire for life, and the rebellion against the narrowness of Jewish home life. Rosa, the heroine, is the daughter of an Ashkenazi father and a Sephardic mother. It is the influence of the latter which predominates at home. The home is full of misery for the father is wayward in his ways, pleasure seeking, and dislikes the mother. Her early sorrows and her natural brilliance and strength of will arouse in her a desire for change. Against the will of her mother and relatives she attends a convent school which estranges her still more from her environment. The erotic instinct awakens in her early, and encouraged by much reading of modern literature she is eager to discover the secret of love and life. When she grows up, beautiful, brilliant, and intoxicated by the new radical ideas, she persuades herself that love is the essence of life. She is free in her conduct with young men, and disregards the ascetic life of Jerusalem.

At that time she is seen by a young Arab Effendi, Tufwik, a scion

of a wealthy family, who bribes her characterless father to introduce him to her. They meet and she immediately falls in love. In her impetuosity she consents to follow him. Tufwik obtains the consent of his father, a liberal man, who hopes that ultimately she will embrace Mohammedanism. Rosa breaks all family bonds, and renounces Judaism. They go to Switzerland, where a new world opens for Rosa, for she believes in the freedom of woman. Tufwik suffers from her conduct, for despite his avowals that he is a European and a liberal, he remains at heart a Muslim. He remonstrates with Rosa, but she preaches the doctrine of freedom and the embraciveness of a love which can include more than one man. He yields during their stay in Switzerland.

When the war ends, they return to Jerusalem, and here Rosa begins to settle down. She is forced for a time to wear Muslim garb and to live in the house of Tufwik's father. Tufwik becomes more and more attached to Muslim life; she, on the other hand, clings more to Judaism, especially after learning that her father, mother, and grandfather had died after her departure. She establishes her own home, and the gap between her and her husband widens. The attack against the Jews in 1921 completes it. Rosa is introduced to the pioneer life, leaves her husband, and goes to a *Kebuzah*. Tufwik divorces her. She remains in the *Kebuzah* and soon falls in love again with the leader of the group whom she marries.

The moral of the story is, as Rosa says, that had Jewish life in her youth been animated by a great ideal and had she known of the existence of such young men and women as the *Haluzim* who were ready to sacrifice themselves for their people, she would have never made the fatal step. The life of the *Haluzim* is pictured with love and sympathy, and the narrative, though long-drawn and interspersed with many quasi-philosophic discussions and remarks, is well constructed. The life of the old Jewish Jerusalem is also reflected with sympathy, though its ugly features are emphasized. But the heroine, Rosa, fails to impress us. She is a typical Levantine, who covers up her passions with fine phrases. We note no struggle in her heart when she makes the fatal step. She accepts Tufwik's love after only a single exchange of letters, and even when she is already spiritually resurrected, as the author terms it, she does not hesitate to take away the lover of Zella, the pioneer woman, her friend, who is largely responsible for her resurrection. And when Zella commits suicide on

that account, the sorrow does not prevent either Rosa or the idealist Azmoni from continuing their love life without remorse. The title *Bat Zion* with which the author crowns her does not suit her. We can forego such daughters. The Arab Tufwik and in general the other Arab characters come off much better from the hand of the author. He seems to have a sympathetic attitude toward the older type of Arab, the pre-War Muslim, before the new nationalism surcharged with hatred made its appearance. In conclusion, we can say that there is much art in Burlo's writings, for in spite of these defects, they hold our interest, and afford us a glimpse in a life hitherto hidden from us.

ii. The Palestinian life before, during, and after the War is also the theme of another Palestinian writer whose pseudonym is Eber ha-Dani. In a trilogy called *Nahalolim* (a desert plant), he endeavors to portray some phases of Jewish life during these periods but is not very successful. His hero, a young man by the name of Jeremiah, came to Palestine from Russia as a young boy in order to study at the newly established gymnasium, and remained there during the War; he then for a time joined the *Haluzim* and also served in the English army. When the War was over, he adjusted himself, though with difficulty, to the new life in Tel-Aviv which was a center of commerce, speculation, and industry, and became one of its more or less useful citizens. He had, of course, some ambitions in his younger years and strove towards ideals which were not clear even to himself. He remains, on the whole, as the author himself puts it, "a small man" (Adam Koton). The other characters in the novel are not much better. They all strive towards something which is rather vague. As a result, we are not moved by the pioneer life presented to us by the author; in spite of all his devices it remains colorless. The only sympathetic trait in that life and in the characters is their patient acceptance of the difficult conditions in which fate has placed them and their willingness to continue their work of rehabilitating the desolate soil in spite of all hazards. We are, however, not certain whether this is done because they are animated by a great national ideal or merely because of habit and indifference arising out of purposelessness of life. Even the semi-romantic character, Shaulow the Caucasian, who left his native mountains and came to Palestine in order to help in the rebuilding of the land, does not impress us, for his talk about doing great things remains mere words and he does not distinguish himself by a single act.

There are, of course, numerous love episodes and the erotic strain is well represented in the long drawn-out story but these, too, do not rise above the ordinary events of life.

We may suppose that the author is to a large extent realistic and that he really depicts phases of Palestinian life in the various periods, but this fact by no means increases the value of the work. The writer does, however, possess narrative ability and the power to describe the details of the life which he delineates and thus he succeeds in arousing in us a fair amount of interest in the story.

iii. A fine Palestinian product with the stamp of the native Oriental spirit are the stories of Moses Smilanski, who writes under the pseudonym of Hawaja Musa, which were collected in two volumes under the title *Bené Arab* (The Children of Arabia). In a large number of stories, Smilanski depicts the wild Arab life in its various phases. Love, the passionate love of the children of the desert, forms a leading motive, inasmuch as he deals with the tragic loves between men and women of feuding tribes or with lives which are affected by customs, traditions, or greed. The other phases of Arab life, though, are well represented; the devout piety of the sheiks, the fatalism and the patient submission to the will of Allah, the superstitions, the excessive pride of the clan for which the Arab is ready to sacrifice life and limb, both his own and his family's, the well known Oriental hospitality—all these are reflected in the stories. Nor are other important traits of the Arab character omitted, such as his love for his horse, especially the nimble-footed mare for whose sake he is ready to sacrifice even the welfare of his children, and similar features. In short, the almost complete life of the native, both fellahins (settled Arabs) and Bedouins in its primitive state as yet unaffected by the taint of European civilization is vividly drawn by the author. The stories date from before the War when the seeds of hatred between the Arabs and the Jews had not yet been sown. The relations between the two peoples as depicted in some of the stories are amicable, and the naïve Arabs often express wonder at the accomplishments of the newcomers and at times even feelings of gratitude towards them for the opportunities for work their colonies supply.

The writer, who is one of the oldest colonists and who had lived in Palestine for several decades, had ample time to observe the life of the Arabs both as an employer and as a friend, and he utilized this observation to great advantage. He reveals to us a new world, small

in its encompass, but exotic, rich in color, and throbbing with human interest. His style, which is vivid, elastic, and well adapted for description, enhances the value of the stories.

Smilanski also wrote a short novel entitled *Toldot Ahabah Ahat* (The Story of a Love Affair), in which the hero, a teacher in one of the Jewish colonies of Palestine, who is also the narrator, tells of his peculiar love affair which lasted for a long time and ended in disappointment. It began when the girl was a child of five and gradually grew with the passing years. For a large part of the time it was one-sided, the girl feeling it only subconsciously, but the disparity of years kept the lovers apart and she married another. Only after the marriage did both recognize the true state of affairs, but it was too late and they separated forever. The story is well written and arouses both our sympathy and interest.

25. OTHER WRITERS

The erotic strain, which is quite in evidence in many of the stories of the younger writers, found its fullest expression in the stories and novels of Eliezer Steinman. In his short stories, he presents characters whose life is torn and broken into fragments, crushed by the conditions of the modern large city life. As most of them have no moorings, for they are immigrants in foreign countries, they are gradually swept by force of circumstances into the lower stratum of society. They struggle, for their earlier education revolts against their fate, but they automatically submit to it. The dominant motive is the erotic which adds confusion to their already turbulent soul by their unsatisfied passions. Steinman is undoubtedly influenced by Gorki and other Russian writers who delved into the soul of the hobo and the flotsam and jetsam of human society, but he lacks their ability or does not endeavor to discover the residue of the good and the ideal under the layers of filth and dirt accumulated by the vicissitudes of life. We are thus left with the repellent though realistic portrayal of a phase of life.

His novels are primarily sex novels, but not of the ordinary type. The author, who seems to be well read in the scientific literature on the problem of sex, gave expression to his views in the novels. In fact, they are hardly novels at all, but rather psychological and partly philosophical studies on the problems of sex, monogamy, and the war of the sexes. Steinman seems to be greatly influenced by the Freudian theory which makes sex the center of human life. In his novel, *Zugot* (Pairs), he

traces the vicissitudes of the heroine, Rachel, from her youth to her death. Nothing seems to matter but love, and he develops such exotic theories as the secret war between the sexes in which the woman really hates the man, her conqueror, and through this hate she evolves her love. Again, this elemental love of the sexes cannot be limited to one man or one woman, hence the problem of monogamy. It is through this complex of problems that his heroine, after much struggle, becomes unfaithful to her husband, first in thought and then in actuality. The author, however, in his attempt to throw a mantle of idealism on her erotic struggles, calls her a martyr for the sake of a purified type of marriage, the character of which is not clear even to himself. The second novel with a strange title, *Dudoim* (a love plant mentioned in the Bible), is an extended analysis of the mental struggles of a psychopathic individual who suffers both from love and hate for a woman, a friend of his wife. It is primarily an attempt to probe into the recesses of the soul, especially the subconscious soul. The psychological analysis is entangled with queer philosophical remarks on personality, reality, nothingness, and is full of paradoxes and absurdities. There is hardly any action but soliloquies and a few dialogues. The author himself felt the queerness of his attempt and appends to the "story" an apology justifying his probing into the abnormal mind by means of knowledge derived from scientific studies and his own inventiveness. Thus did the sex complex now so popular in certain literary circles reach Hebrew literature. Steinman undoubtedly possesses talent, psychological insight, and also a philosophic bent of mind as well as a mastery of the language, and very frequently he succeeds in arousing our interest in the mystic drama of the abnormal soul. On the whole, though, his novels are repellent and are made more so by his special delight in the uncovering of many things which had better remain hidden. Perforce we will have to grant to modern Hebrew literature its aberrations in art but not of such art. This art is not a contribution of the Jewish genius but an imitation of the decadence of the belletristic art of Europe.

ii. Steinman's art is after all an exception in the recent Hebrew literature. The other authors dealt with Jewish life in one form or another, and to such writers belongs also Freiman, a young writer from Soviet Russia who described in his novel 1919 Jewish life in the Ukraine, during the early days of the Russian Revolution when governments in that province were changing almost daily, and the Jews served as a target for blows from the hands of all contending parties. The scene is laid

at Paraganowka, a town in the Ukraine and the above year was the one when the Austro-Germans were gradually evacuating that province, leaving it to the mercy of the various bands while the Bolshevicki were just entering it. The author describes very skilfully the rise of hatred among the Ukrainians towards their Jewish neighbors who but yesterday were their friends and benefactors; the bewilderment of the Jews at the change in the feelings of the Ukrainians with whom they had lived in peace for many years. He also portrays the struggle of the Jews of that town to withstand the tide of hatred and beastliness flooding all Ukraine in that year and their success in escaping the fate of their brethren in many other places. That was primarily due to the hero of the story, a certain Solomon Stupshover, a Jew raised in the Ukrainian village and saturated with its spirit, who after escaping from an Austrian prison camp, hastened to his village to resume his former life. As an Ukrainian, he together with his friends, dreamt the dream of freedom and could at first not understand the changed attitude of the Ukrainian peasant. But when he became convinced of the fact, his pride and bravery arose in him and he organized the self-defense league in the little town and succeeded even in allying with himself several honest Ukrainian peasants. With this small group he managed to repel the numerous attacks of the various bands, until the Bolshevicki extended their rule to this town. There is also a love affair between Solomon and a Jewish village girl, Shewza, who idolizes his strength and bravery, but this is only an episode. The portrayal of Jewish life in this stormy time is the main purpose. What is most interesting in the story is the fact how life can stubbornly cling to normal ways and habits in the midst of most abnormal and disturbing conditions. The Jews of Paraganowka keep up their petty merchandising, their meetings, daily prayers, and all other ways of life under the shadow of death which stalks all around them and is ready to emerge any hour from the near-by villages and forests. The booming of distant cannons and the nearer rifle shots are accepted as almost natural events. Freiman's narrative is well constructed, the style simple but exact, and very appropriate for the portrayal of this peculiar life.

CHAPTER III

THE POETRY OF THE POST-HASKALAH PERIOD

26. *GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS*

The survey of the belletristic prose literature in the preceding chapter sufficiently demonstrated the effects of the national idea and its gradual realization upon Hebrew literary activity during the period. The comparatively large mass of fiction, discussed by us, represents only a part of that type of literature produced during the short span of half a century. And what has been said of the prose belles-lettres applies also to the poetry of the period, the production of which in its quantity by far overshadows that of the Haskalah period. This, however, is not its main distinction, for that lies primarily in its quality. The poetic genius of modern Hebrew literature, which began to reveal itself during the second Haskalah period and found expression in the works of the two Lebensohns and Judah Leib Gordon, developed much strength and vigor during that period under discussion. It manifested more and more its depth, beauty, and originality, and in the works of several poets it reached great heights bursting forth in full glory. This development, though, is more of a gradual than a sporadic nature. There is no impassible gulf between the few gifted poets and the lesser luminaries, as there was in the poetry of the Haskalah, and the number of those who gained admission into the palace of the Muses is considerable, though some remained only in the vestibule, and others reached the antechamber, and only a few penetrated into the sanctum.

The nature of the poetry is even more heterogenous than that of the preceding period. The heterogeneity, however, is more one of degree than of kind, for in reality recent poetry has dropped many of the features prevalent in the earlier type of poetic productions. There is no tendency to polemicize against rigid piety and fanaticism, nor against the standardized form of Jewish life. Nor is there a tendency to enlighten the Jews, to glorify knowledge, or to reveal to them the wide horizon of the great world, and to contrast it with the narrow confines

of life within the ghetto. There is even a lessening of the humanistic strain inasmuch as there is no special emphasis laid upon glorification of universalism and the speedy arrival of the reign of righteousness, though there are vigorous protests against the lack of ideals in contemporary life. There is also but slight interest in the philosophic phases of nature and life, and the type of contemplative poem is, on the whole, a rarity, and only found among earlier poets of the period who had not yet emancipated themselves from the influence of the Haskalah. In short, all the traits which particularly characterized the poetry of the period of enlightenment have been to a great extent eliminated. The heterogeneity consists rather in the richness of expression, in the individuality of the poets, and in the multifariousness of poetic forms.

On the whole, the poetry, like the prose belles-lettres, reflects the influence of the two forces in Jewish life at the time which were described by us above (Sec. 4),—the centrifugal and the centripetal. Though apparently opposed to each other, they complete one another inasmuch as they both are a result of the national ideal, of the striving to make the Jews a nation like all other nations. It would not be fair to label the poetry nationalistic, though the spirit of nationalism seems to animate it and the best of its productions are impressed by its stamp. Still that term does not cover even, in a broad sense, all of its phases, for side by side with the reflection of the life of the nation in its various phases, there struggles for expression the personal life of the poets. The singers, those who deserve that name, give voice to their own reactions to the world, life, and man. Most of the poets though born in the ghetto, were not circumscribed by its rules and habits, and their experiences of life were at times as varied as that of other poets. And when they sing of love and the beauty of nature and man, it is not as with the bards of the Haskalah, a matter of duty but of feeling, and the poems emanate with many of them from hearts throbbing with a desire for the beautiful and thirsting for the companionship of nature and man. Hence, the poetic genius of the age is a compound both of nationalistic and general human elements, the former, however, predominating.

The nationalistic spirit which plays such an important role in the poetry of the age, is not of the static and passive type; it is not a mere expression of love and veneration for the traditions and the past of the people, but of a dynamic, conscious and active character. It embraces

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the principal phases of the life of the nation—joy and sorrow, tragedy and hope. In no other period of poetic activity did the words of Judah ha-Levi,

“To wail for thine affliction
I am like the jackal,
But when I dream of the return of thy captivity
I am a harp for thy songs,”

which served as a motto for many Jewish poets during the ages, receive so full an expression as in the poetry of the period under discussion. In no other age was the tragedy of the Jewish people portrayed in its unfathomable depth as in the poems of this age. But though the woes of the nation find stronger and more vigorous poetic utterance than its joys and hopes, yet the latter also reverberate loudly in the songs of the bards.

As a result of these two factors, dynamic nationalism and the variation of poetic emotion, both of which endowed the poems with a richness of expression and a manifold of nuances and modes, there ensued multifariousness of form. We have in the poetry numerous lyrical songs, a number of idylls, many ballads and sonnets, historical narrative poems, and phantasies, but few epics. The poets of this age were more upright in their strivings, more genuine in their devotion to the Muses and therefore more conscious of their limitations and so did not undertake the writing of epics which requires calmness of spirit and broadness of conception, qualities which the restless and eruptive character of Jewish life as well as of the personal experiences of the singers hardly permitted them to acquire. Nor is the drama more prevalent in this period than in the earlier, for in spite of the general improvement in poetry there was hardly a drama produced which deals with contemporary Jewish life, with the exception of several written originally in Yiddish and later translated into Hebrew. The few dramas, which were written during the time, deal as hitherto with Biblical subjects. The stormy and turbulent times as well as the general inclination of the poets toward lyricism were not conducive to the development of dramatic creativeness.

However, while the Bible still supplied material for dramatization it yielded to the Agada as a source for historical and narrative poems. Whenever the poets of the present age turn to the past to draw from it inspiration in their idealization of the national renaissance, or in their glorification of the Jewish tragedy, or for any other purpose it is the

rich storehouse of the Agada or the Mediaeval legends rather than the Bible, which supplies the necessary emotional impulse. The reason for it is obvious. The Bible, except in the Psalms and other devotional songs which are thoroughly saturated with a religious lyricism, possesses in its narrative and prophetic portions little of that strain, and is on the whole, impressed with the strain of sternness. The poets of the period who are lyrical but not religious, could therefore hardly utilize the Bible for their purpose, while the Agada in the broad sense of the word with its folkloristic tone and its numerous mirrorings of the national feeling and its poetic embellishments of history is an inexhaustible mine of emotional stimulation to the poets of our day. It is only when the poets attempt to scale the heights of the sublime or assume the prophetic role in chastising their people for their erroneous ways, or on the contrary, seek to comfort them in their misery with more than ordinary certainty, that they seek to resort to the Bible. As a result we have a considerable number of poems of prophetic type expressing reproach, but they are free from both satire and polemic. They express indignation and anguish, but never ridicule.

In addition to the above characteristics we must take cognizance of the style of the poetic productions of the period. In poetry the form is as important as the content, for it is often the form which exalts and raises us above the humdrum of daily life. In this regard the poets of the time rise high above their predecessors. In no other branch of literary production has Hebrew style made such remarkable progress as in the poetic. There is a veritable wealth of expression in the songs and poems and a picturesqueness of figures of speech which were unknown before. Several of the greater poets ransacked the treasures of Hebrew literature and borrowed the choicest expressions, in order to embellish their thoughts; quite frequently they decorated their production with Western imagery and added to it a touch of Oriental coloring.

In conclusion we may emphasize once more that while recent poetry is distinguished by its genuineness of feeling and at times even by its depth; it lacks on the whole, the contemplative spirit. The creativeness of the poetry is expressed primarily in the deepening of the old current of ideas and views giving them renewed emotional impetus; but there is little inventiveness. This is due partly to a general lack of inventiveness in literature in our days and partly to the aberrations of Jewish genius in modern times from its fundamental and natural way of ex-

pression. In general, the poetry of the age is permeated with a genuine Jewishness and is far from the meanderings of temper which we noticed in fiction; but occasionally we hear even in these productions the rumblings of rebellion against tradition and piety.

27. *THE EARLIER NATIONAL AND LYRIC POETS: M. M. DOLITZKI, N. H. IMBER, Z. H. MANEH, CONSTANTIN SHAPIRO, AND DAVID FRISHMAN*

The new trend in Hebrew poetry which began to deviate more and more from that of the Haskalah period made its appearance in the early eighties in the works of a group of poets who, despite the fact that they display certain diversities have one trait in common—a lyric strain. In some cases this quality is primarily national, while in others, it is mainly individual and generally human. But even with the latter, the national element is not absent, although it is expressed indirectly through the glorification of historical ideals, rather than as a direct call for the renaissance. The first of this school was Menahem Mendel Dolitzki (1856-1931).

i. Dolitzki was born in Bialostok, an important Jewish community in Lithuania and later settled in Moscow where he lived for ten years. There he experienced in his own person the misery which resulted from the infamous discriminatory May laws issued in 1882, and was finally expelled in 1890. He left for the United States where, due to the unfavorable circumstances for any literary activity prevailing at the time among the Jews, he was forced to abandon his devotion to the Hebrew Muse and engage in various occupations, among them the concoction of long novels of a questionable literary character for the Yiddish dailies. He was ultimately forgotten and died forsaken even by the new generation of American Hebraists. During this later period of his life, he wrote but few Hebrew poems, and only one of poetic value.

He began his poetic activity in the late years of the second Haskalah period and published a number of poems written in the spirit of that time, among them a long narrative poem, entitled *Likui Shené ha-Maorot* (The Eclipse of the Two Luminaries), published in Smolenskin's *ha-Shahar* in the years 1877-1878. It is a satire on Ḥassidism, especially on *Zaddikism*, and the ignorance of the followers of the cult. In it he displays a mastery of the language and great skill in rhyming but little else. Soon, however, he was moved by the pogroms and stirred to the depths of his soul by the new ideal of the *Hobebé*

Zion, and his lyre began to emit tones of sweetness and strength. Do-litzki became then the uncrowned poet laureate of the movement.

This poetry is entirely national and deals with both phases, the Jewish tragedy and the hope for Zion. These form the only axes around which his poetry revolves during this period. Nothing else matters; he is not allured by the beauty of nature except in his description of Palestine, nor touched by love except his love for Zion. His poems on Jewish misery evince much strength and his narrative poem, *ha-Halom we-Sibro* (The Dream and the Interpretation), displays deep pathos and biting irony on Christian piety and love. His shorter poems on the same theme, however, display more naturalness and genuine feeling than his more ambitious creations. One of them particularly called *Shir Golah* (The Song of an Exile) combines a pathetic note with the swing of a marching song. It reads thus:

Now take your ancient staff, O plundered Jew,
The staff you held more than two thousand years;
And fill your bag with bread as beggars do
And fill your jug with water and with tears.

Then gird your loins with strength, O, gird them tight!
And in the girdle, tuck your garment's hem
And place within the fold your infants—for the blight,
The bitter road will soon be known to them.

And on your shoulders bear the tired one
Who gave them life and labored at your side.
Now bend your back from dawn to set of sun
And wander! wander! for the world is wide.

Go into exile! Go! the wrath of God
Pours forth a mighty flood,—you dare not stay—
Then flee, escape the fury of the rod,
The whirling sword behind you points the way.¹

Unfortunately, these words written more than half a century ago, are as true and truer in their grim reality today as they were then.

Greater strength and feeling are evinced in his songs of hope. In numerous lyrics the poet pours forth his deep love for Zion. Like ha-Levi, by whom he was greatly influenced, he serenades Zion, his beloved, in glowing stanzas, as:

¹ *Shiré Menaḥem*, p. 64. New York, 1900.

Thou glorious land of song,
The land of fruit and flower,
In the eternity of nature
Thou art the everlasting spring.

Again:

Sweet light, delight of the eyes
Spreads in thee like a wide river.
In thee, beloved, there is no darkness
Even the shadows are luminous.²

Like the Psalmist of old, he swears eternal fealty to his beloved in a song entitled *Im Eshkohek* (If I Forget Thee) and quite stirring is his request in the poem, *Sheolati u-Bakashati* (My Request and Plea), wherein he asks his people not for help for his poor children after his death, nor for praise, nor fame, but

One thing I pray—that it alone
You will inscribe upon the stone
That marks the furrow where my body lies.
For memory's sake, I bid you write
That Zion, Zion was my sole delight
Until the earth pressed down upon my eyes.³

In all these poems there are neither new ideas expressed nor marked poetic flights but there is rhythm and a feeling which is genuine and strong. There is a lyricism which, though old, still found so strong an echo in the hearts of the Lovers of Zion in those days that a number of Dolitzki's songs of Zion were sung for years at Zionist gatherings. When the young poet left Russia in 1892, Judah Leib Gordon, the greatest bard of the Haskalah, sent him a poem wherein he called him "my neighbor in the divine courts" and concluded with an offer of his pen, saying, "Here is my pen, rise and take my place."

However, it was not destined that he take his place nor could he have taken it. From the day that he stepped on the soil of America he divorced his Muse. Only once more did he break forth in a plaintive song, full of the pathos both of the individual and the nation. It is entitled *Shahar Shel Mi* (Whose Morning Star) and was written in the year 1903 at the celebration of his literary half-jubilee. In it the poet remembers the enthusiasm of his youth, when every ray of progress seemed to be a forerunner and a harbinger of light which would dispel

² Ibid., p. 26.

³ Ibid., p. 42.

darkness and its terrors. Alas, these dreams had long gone. In his later years, the poet learned better. There is light and air in the world but only for the few and he says mournfully:

Whose morning star art thou, say,
Whom dost thou, messenger of day, presage light?
Behold, I and my people sink daily
Into abysses of poverty, of humility
And anxiety pierces the morrow to its very depths.⁴

We must not forget that it was written under the impression of the Kishenew pogrom, and the poet thus expressed his own loneliness and the misery of his people. This was the swan song of Dolitzki, and is probably the best though one of the least known of his poems.

ii. The national ideal and the love of Zion was also the motive and theme of another poet of those days, Naphtali Herz Imber (1857-1910). Imber was born in Galicia, but spent many years in wandering about from country to country. He was a colorful personality and was used by Zangwill as the prototype of one of his heroes in a popular novel. Being greatly influenced by the incipient movement of the *Hobebé Zion* he spent six years in Palestine but ultimately drifted to the United States where he led the life of a semi-vagabond. He was a man of temperament, capable at times of displaying great enthusiasm for an idea, but on the whole, he was of weak character.

In the year 1886, during his stay in Palestine, he published his first small collection of poems under the name of *Barḳoe* (The Morning Star). It was followed by two other collections under the same name in 1901 and 1905, but it is on the first collection, consisting entirely of national poems, that his poetic reputation rests. Imber's excellence consists mainly in the fact that he succeeded in attuning himself to the popular striving for redemption and that he caught the rhythm of the folk song. There is genuine feeling in his poems but not much depth, nor is there flight of imagination or breadth of vision. But the fine rhetorical phrases, the lightness of rhythm, and the swing of the march well adapted to the chorus, together with the tone of confidence and the blare of patriotic pride, brought them into great favor with the "Lovers of Zion." It thus came about that one of his poems, *ha-Tikwáh*, became the national hymn of the Zionists and indirectly of the entire Jewish people. It is undoubtedly a great merit to become

⁴ *Neginot Sejat Zion*, pp. 3-7.

the author of a hymn sung by Jews the world over and this alone entitles him to a place among the singers of Israel.

iii. Far superior to both of these bards in intensity of feeling, flight of imagination, and poetic vigor, was Mordecai Zebi Maneh (1859-86) who died at the age of twenty-seven before he had attained full poetic stature. However, the small collection of poems left to us bear the mark of real talent.

Maneh was born in Radoshkowitz, a small town in the province of Wilna, Lithuania. His education was of the ordinary type and like many other children of poor parents, the youth spent a number of years in various *Yeshivot* in the near-by cities of Minsk and Wilna. From his early years Maneh displayed a great talent for drawing and strove to become a painter. This desire he began to realize during his student days in Wilna, for while he officially attended the *Yeshibah*, he secretly visited the art school of that city. After many tribulations he succeeded in entering, in 1880, the Academy of Art at St. Petersburg and there distinguished himself by his paintings and won several medals. His future then seemed assured and his hopes ran high, but not for long. The hard work undermined his health and he fell a prey to tuberculosis. After discovering the grave nature of his malady, he interrupted his studies at the Academy and returned to his home where he died after a few years of suffering.

The aesthetic sense of the gifted youth was not satisfied with the creation of painting alone, but craved for a deeper expression of the soul, that of lyric poetry, which he began to publish in the twentieth year of his life on the eve of his entry in the Academy of Art. His earliest poems were motivated by a love of beauty and nature. Later when the national ideal made its appearance in Jewish life, he gave expression in his poetry to his love for his people and a strong longing for distant Zion. Love of nature, of life which was slipping away from him, and of his people and Zion, these were his motives and themes. He knew no other love in his short life.

In his early poems he was still under the influence of the Haskalah period, especially under that of the older Lebensohn. Like him, he philosophizes in his first ode to the world, *ka-Alot ha-Shahar* (At the Rise of the Dawn) and wonders at the harmony which the manifold of the cosmos presents and at the divine plan manifested in it. And like him, he is filled with sorrow when he turns from nature to life, for while in the former, good predominates over evil, the reverse is true

of the latter. He thus injected in his very first poetic outburst the note of sorrow which permeates most of his poems.

Soon, however, he chose his own way and began to paint the beauty of nature in delicate tints, which charm us by their exquisiteness. In a poem entitled '*Et Oshri* (The Time of My Happiness) he sings as follows:

There is a moment when the stalks of grain
In holy language murmur a refrain,
Embrace in love and kiss with gentle air
When butterflies like sparkling gems appear.

There is a moment when through wooded shrine
A whispered prayer ascends—pure and divine—
And yet a moment when the sullen breeze
Calls to the storm to bend, and shake the trees.⁵

Then when he thus imbibes the beauty of nature he forgets his sorrow and joyously concludes:

No more will I the world despise,
With joyous heart I'll tread the sea.
Above all grief—my soul, arise!
And sing your song of praise to God.⁶

Happiness, however, is not permanent, for soon sorrow comes and grips his heart, and a premonition of the impending doom disturbs his spirit. This note permeates a number of the poems; especially beautiful is the one entitled *ha-Lailah* (Night), written in lines containing two words each of three syllables, in the manner of Dob Lebensohn's *Dal Mébin* (Vol. III, Sec. 37), where the poet pictures the stillness of the night, the rest and quietude it brings to man on the one hand, and the disturbance and storm in his own heart, on the other hand.

The same feeling, tinged with a romantic wistfulness for peace and joy which do not come, is also expressed in the national poem, *Masa'at Nafshi* (The Longing of My Soul). It is national in spirit but individual in form and tone, for the poet expresses his own love for distant Palestine and his intense longing for the idyllic life which he imagines prevails there. In it his two loves, that of nature and of Zion, mingle and the longing for both is expressed in beautiful stanzas:

⁵ *Kol Kitbé Manch*, p. 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Behold spring's golden sun descend
Red-robed in proud surrender.
Its radiance flames in heaven's end
And fills the eyes with splendor.

The gentle twilight bids: Be still!
To leave in silence sleeping
And on a solitary hill
The bard his watch is keeping.

Suddenly the silence is disturbed by a light breeze and the flapping of wings. It is the circling of the stork in the blue above, and the poet, in envy of the bird, exclaims:

Then eastward, eastward I would fly
Where sang ha-Levi—soon to die;
And there in fields of fruit and grain
How quickly I would ease my pain.

Where are you, where, O holy land?
My heart yearns for the golden strand
Whose air is food for weary soul
And makes the broken body whole.⁷

A vision of idyllic life rises before him in which he sees himself invigorated and restored to health, strength, and hope, and he expresses this vision in fine measured verses which inspire us with a similar longing for that distant land.

Manch, however, was capable at times of moving us not only with longing and romantic desires, but also with strength and confidence, hope and optimism. This note is heard in the poem, *'Am Olam* (Eternal People), in which replying to the complaints of many who expressed their doubts about the vitality of the Jewish people and its ability to withstand the tribulations and suffering encompassing it on all sides, the poet declares vigorously:

No one can slay
Or cause to waste away
A people that brings forth such men:
Priest, Levite, bard,
Prophets to warn and guard,
And grave on stone God's sacred precepts ten.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 147, 148.

And after portraying in a number of stanzas the strength and vigor of the people, he concludes:

Though life's relentless waves will flow
O'er many kingdoms blotted out below,
The long eternity of future years
Will see a people that was nursed on tears
Alive and strong; its ancient spirit bright,
Lighting the dark with an eternal light.⁸

This tone of hope and confidence struck a responsive chord in the hearts of the people, and both the *'Am Olam* and the *Masa'at Nafshi* were set to music and for a number of years sung at Zionist gatherings. It is difficult to foretell to what heights the young bard would have soared, for he certainly had the makings of a great poet, had his voice not been silenced by the grim hand of death.

iv. Another lyrical poet of the same period who was to some extent a national poet as well was Constantin Shapiro (1841-1900). Shapiro's life was a tragic one, for in his youth he suffered much from the narrow fanaticism of his father who used all means to prevent him from following the path of the Haskalah. When he finally did emancipate himself from the tutelage of his parent, it was to encounter real tragedy. A concatenation of circumstances led him, in a moment of weakness, to convert himself. Under the Czar's regime he could not retrace his fatal step and was forced to live for the rest of his life as a modern Marrano. His life henceforth became one round of suffering, for his spirit was saturated with love for his people, its traditions, and religion. His compunction was intense and his remorse deep. As years passed, his agony increased, for though officially excluded from the oppression to which the great majority of the Jews in Russia were subjected, he suffered with them mentally, and doubly so for he considered himself a traitor. It is the echo of this pain and tragedy that we hear in his poems, for he, a pathetic figure himself, probably felt deeper than many of his contemporaries the pathos of the Jewish fate.

The first small collection of poems entitled *mi-Shiré Yeshurun* (The Songs of Jeshurun, another name for Israel) is entirely dominated by two motives, love for his people and rage against its tormentors which is all the greater because it is impotent. The first group of lyric songs is devoted to the plight of Israel, and opens thus:

⁸ Ibid., pp. 90, 92.

A golden harp is Israel—its strings
 Are heaven's own rays,
 That trembling, pour a melody that sings
 Of holiness when poet plays.
 Alas, the melody is sad and low,
 For God has tuned the harp strings so.⁹

The poet dexterously manipulates that harp and eloquently and movingly tells of the deep tragedy of Israel. From plaint he turns to wrath and breaks forth in rage against the universe itself.

He exclaims:

Give me a coal from out the fires of Hell
 For Sodom and Gemorrah's flame I yearn,
 Or, could I take from out my heart a brand
 I'd set the world on fire and let it burn.¹⁰

Still, strong as these words may appear and stirring as they may be, it was not destined for Shapiro to be the poet of wrath. That role was reserved for a greater and more powerful bard than he. He excels rather in the quiet descriptive lyric and ballad, such as the ones which portray Rachel rising from her grave at midnight and swiftly gliding towards the Jordan into which she silently pours her tears. Charming also are his semi-idyllic poems, *Ereb Shabbat* (On the Eve of the Sabbath) and *Birkat ha-Nerot* (The Blessing of the Candles) in which the blessing, the holiness of the Sabbath, the rest and quietude it bestows upon the Jewish home and soul are sung of and glorified. In these outpourings of love for the traditions and faith of his people the poet sought to atone for his own defection.

Shapiro also employed several Biblical motives for his poems, and the one entitled *we-Nikdash be-Esh*, describing the inauguration of the prophet Isaiah and the high lights of his prophecy, is especially vigorous. It is animated by a glow of the spirit of prophecy itself and it is this glow which inspires the singer to conclude his vision with the following words, full of confidence and hope.

The words of the prophet for aye will be ringing,
 Flaming, resounding, consoling, and singing
 Shining in splendor for ages unending
 Never extinguished, forever ascending.¹¹

⁹ Collected Poems, p. 75.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 132.

Shapiro's poetic genius reaches its height though not in his lyrics but in national ballads. In the *mé-Hesyonot Bat Ami* (The Visions of My People) whose two long narrative poems or ballads, which comprise the bulk of the collection, are written in the form of reminiscences, the poet envisions before us the legends he heard in his youth from the mouth of his teacher in the dim twilight of wintry afternoons. The more distant he was from his people, the greater the love which he nourished in his heart for the martyred nation, its dreams, and its hopes. The poet found compensation for his pangs of remorse and pain of sin in these visions through which he illumined the past and future with the light of love and tragedy. The hope of redemption and the longing for the Messiah form the motive of the ballads. To cloak his thought, Shapiro borrowed some folk legends and through them and in a style close to that of the legends he sings of the nation's hopes and their frequent frustrations. David, the heroic king of Israel, whom Jewish lore credits with immortality, is the subject of the first ballad. The poet pictures David reposing in slumber, like King Frederic Barbarossa of the Germans, somewhere in a crystal cave, waiting for the Messiah. His awakening, so runs the legend, is to be the signal of the coming of the redeemer, and so two Jewish youths in their zeal for redemption go in search of the cave determined to awaken the ancient king. In their adventure they are helped and encouraged by the prophet Elijah, the harbinger of good tidings, symbol of the eternal Jewish longing for redemption. The bold youths reach the cave after many tribulations, but alas, the splendor and glamor of its walls cause them to forget the directions of Elijah to pour the holy water on the slumbering king's outstretched hands and the monarch is not awakened, and the coming of the Messiah is still delayed. In a soul-stirring couplet the poet expresses the deep tragedy of the oft-repeated disappointment of the hopes for redemption experienced by the people, thus:

The Shekinah weeps: the harp of David trembles and the glow
Of poet's vision leaps
Like white foam where the swiftest waters flow.¹²

A legend current among the Jews of Palestine that the coming of the Messiah will be heralded by the cessation of the annual visits of the fox to the ruins of the Temple on the ninth of Ab is the theme of the second ballad. Year after year, watchers had been sent to the place

¹² Ibid., p. 14.

where the Temple stood to watch for the fox. His visits were made regularly. One year, however, he is delayed. The sun begins to incline towards the West and the fox is not seen. Hopes rise and joy grows. The lone watcher, the *Shamesh* (Beadle) who remains at his post until sunset counts the minutes as he waits for the final sinking of the sun. The stage is set, hearts are atremble. The watcher falls asleep and vision after vision passes before his eyes—the whole tragedy of the exile unrolls in scenes before him and are followed by visions of redemption, by visions of the pleading of the Patriarchs and of Moses, and of Rachel, the mother of the nation, praying to God to have mercy upon her children. God almost yields to the passionate pleas, but Satan interferes and all turns to naught. The eyes of the *Shamesh* open and in the dim light of the last rays of the setting sun he discerns the glowing eyes of the fox.

Thus the poet sings of the woes and hopes of his people in the form of stories told by his teacher, the Melamed of old. The whole atmosphere of the poem is saturated with a yearning for a life that is gone never to return, with a longing for the years of childhood when peace and quiet reigned in his soul. Through all these narratives and lyrics there appears the hazy image of a little girl, Zipporah, the daughter of his teacher, child companion of the poet, an image full of grace, charm, and goodness. To this Zipporah the poet devotes a poem idealizing her image, gilding it with the rays of the fading sun of his life.

In these ballads, and especially in the prologues, there is a strong personal note in which we hear the voice of the deep tragedy in the poet's heart. He tells of his pain at the misery of his people which takes place before his eyes but in which he is neither able to participate nor alleviate. His heart is torn, for though he deserted his people and gave to others, as he says, "The flesh of his heart and his blood, yet the bark of the dogs is still heard and secretly they bite and very deeply at that." It is his accumulated scorn and wrath at the tormentors of his nation which reverberates in his song.

Shapiro, with his poetic spirit and occasional flights in the empyrean of the Muses, could have become, had the circumstances been favorable, one of the great national poets of Israel, but there were many pitfalls in his life and spirit. He was also much hampered by his poor technique and limited mastery of language. His style which is, on the whole, limited to the Bible, for he did not avail himself of the rich treasures of the Agada, does not keep pace with the spirit of the poems,

and as a result the effect of the song is frequently impaired. In poetry, form and matter are of equal value, and Shapiro did fall short in the matter of form, though, he utilized the full possibilities of the Biblical language. Yet, the glow of his inner light shines forth, and the warmth of his great love for his suffering people is diffused through his songs, which both exalt and elevate us.

v. A spirit kindred to the one permeating the poems of Maneh and Shapiro, though of a different nature, also pervades the poetry of David Frishman. This brilliant and many-sided writer was of a double and perhaps of a triple personality. While in his critical articles, essays, and feuilletons, he appears as the stern judge, the objective observer, ironical and often cynical reviewer of the events of Jewish life, in his belletristic writings, both in prose and verse, he is revealed to us as the romanticist, as the man of deep feeling and lyrical soul. We have already noted that tone cropping up in his short stories, but it is in his poetry that it comes to full expression.

Frishman was an occasional poet and turned to verse only at rare moments. Consequently, the number of his poems and songs is comparatively small and were collected in two small volumes. But, with the exception of a number of feuilletons in verse, they are impressed with the stamp of beauty both in content and form. Their main characteristic, however, is their concern with a peculiar theme. It is not the beauty of nature or of man which the poet sings of or depicts but the beauty of life. It is the beauty or rather the nobility manifested at certain moments in the life of man, or in actions which rise above the ordinary and the common-place that our poet is in search of. In this, in spite of his insistence throughout his long literary career on introducing the West-European spirit into Hebrew literature, he remained typically Jewish. Such beauty, however, is on the whole, rare in daily life. Hence, the poet turned to the legend, folk tale, and story for material for his poems. As a result, the narrative poem, the ballad, the legend, are the forms in which his Muse primarily expressed itself. These forms were best suited for his poetic genius for Frishman was a man of fine but not deep feeling. He always strove towards a goal, but he could not tell precisely and exactly what that goal was. He excelled more in the poetic background than in its essence, in description of the atmosphere of the exalted moments or of the noble actions rather than in that of the moment or of the act itself. The halo with which he surrounds these is full of mysticism, of striving and longing, and hence

we are moved by the poem and at times charmed, but never stirred. In addition, there is an artificiality in many of his poems, an attempt at rhetorical expression, and at times a didactic strain. In fact, he wrote several didactic poems in which thought predominates over feeling.

The figure of the Messiah famed in Jewish lore was considered by Frishman as the most characteristic expression of that beauty of life of which he was in search, and hence he made it the subject of two of his best poems. The first poem opens with a vision, in the manner of Isaiah, of the throne of God to which the Messiah is chained with golden chains.* The poet then addresses a passionate plea to the Messiah in which he tells that he recognizes the redeemer by the holy fire in his eye, that fire which glows in the eye of every poet, dreamer, and true prophet, by the lines of mercy and love stamped on his countenance and more, by the chains on his hand. He continues his address by describing the struggle in the soul of the Messiah who endeavors to break his chains and rush to the help of the down-trodden and the suffering, and redeem the world from its iniquity, but in vain. This is followed by the plaint of the Messiah who revolts against his destiny. He moans and asks, "Why hast Thou given me a feeling heart which responds to the cry of the unfortunate? Why, O, why, hast thou given me the spirit which longs to help and redeem, and yet hast chained my hands?" The poet then hears in the stillness of the night the reverberating clang of the chains of the Messiah in his endeavor to break them, and he concludes his poem with the words uttered by a voice from heaven, saying:

When a new generation will arise,
A generation who will understand redemption,
Who will desire, long, and prepare for it
Then shalt thou be redeemed
Then shalt thou redeem.¹⁸

In this poem, the Messiah becomes a symbol of all human striving for peace and justice in the world. These strivings, however, are thwarted but adds the poet, "Redemption can come to suffering humanity when the striving for justice will be genuine and fill the hearts of men." Frishman thus expressed his scepticism about idealism, and in-

* This motif was first used by Frug (Sec. 71) in one of his poems, but at present I am unaware of any basis for it in the Agada. What we find there is that the Messiah is impatient at his being prevented from redeeming Israel. It is most likely Frug's invention and Frishman probably borrowed the theme from him.

¹⁸ Collected Poems, p. 15.

directly about the Jewish national movement towards which he always entertained a critical attitude.

The second poem, called *Bishvil ha-Moshiah* (For the Sake of the Messiah), expresses the same idea in a much lighter and somewhat ironic manner. It consists of four parts, each of which portrays the preparation of certain articles for the Messiah; the first the shoe for his horse; the second, a girdle of silk; the third, his flag; and the last his soul. The first three are completely finished and shine in full beauty, but the soul is not yet completed, for alas!

There is not yet enough of the sublime,
Enough of light and splendor,
Not even the sigh pure and true.
Woe, woe, it is not found yet;
Therefore, woe, Oh, woe until to date
The soul of the Messiah is not
Ready and complete.¹⁴

The form of the poem is superb. It has swing and movement, and the poet uses all devices to endow it with the tone and color of a folk song. There is repetition of verses, and onomatopoeic expressions imitating the striking of a hammer, the bursting of the sparks in a smithy, the movement of the weaver's shuttle, and the plying of the crocheter's needle.

The beauty of action is the theme of the ballad, *ha-Nedabah* (The Contribution). It is based on a belief current among the Jews that when death is decreed for a person, he can be redeemed by offerings of years of life made by kinsmen and friends. In this poem, as in most ballads, the theme is undying love, and the sacrifice that one makes for the sake of the beloved. Bat Shuah, the beautiful daughter of the rich Jew of the town, falls in love with the best student (*Ilui*) of the *Yeshibah*. The student is unaware of the fact, but her love for him is strong. When the *Ilui* falls sick and all cures fail, the last device is resorted to. Two leading elders collect offerings of years. When Bat Shuah is approached she offers her entire life. In the stillness of the night, two spirits flutter, one descending and one ascending. The *Ilui* revives and Bat Shuah dies. The atmosphere of the act is exquisite; it is enveloped in a romantic haze and is embellished, often unnecessarily, with bits of legendary lore. Frishman's other ballads deal with the usual subject, tragic love which leads to death.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Frishman also drew his poetic material from legends about historical personalities, and thus made an attempt at quasi-epical poetry. But the resemblance of these poems to epics is one of form only, while in content they are really didactic, for the poet always uses these historical personalities and the legends embellishing their lives only as vehicles for the expression of thoughts which are at times exalted and at times of a commonplace character. Of such a type is his narrative poem *Sheté Keorot* (Two Plates). He utilizes for his purpose a well known legend about Moses which relates that when he was brought as an infant before Pharaoh, his wisdom was tested by placing before him two plates, one full of gold, and the other of hot coals. The wise infant stretched out his hand towards the gold, but an angel pushed it toward the coals, and thus, while he was saved from death, for were he to take the gold, he would have been identified as the future redeemer of Israel and killed, he burned his hands and lips. In the poem, the glowing coal is symbolized as the burning fire of truth in the heart of the prophet, which, as he tells Joshua before his death, made him unhappy for it placed a barrier between him and the people. But while in this part of the poem the thought still elevates us, it degenerates into the commonplace in the second part, where Moses advises Joshua to take the gold in order to succeed in leadership, an ordinary travesty upon the worship of Mammon so prevalent in our times. Similarly, in his poem, *Elilim* (Idols), he utilizes the legend about Abraham breaking the idols to express chagrin about false idealism in the world and the need to shatter all petty gods which men in their ignorance set up. No attempt is made to delineate the character of Abraham which is revealed in that legendary act, or his struggle with the traditions of his ancestors and his passion for truth. It seems that the publicist and the ironic critic in Frishman overcame the poet and that he sought to produce a brilliant effect and to display a keenness of mind rather than to stir the soul by depth of thought and flight of imagination. His historical titles are therefore often merely pretexts and at times even misleading. Of such a nature is the poem *Daniel be-Gob ha-Arayot* (Daniel in the Den of Lions) which was written under the impression of the pogroms early in this century. There is practically nothing about Daniel and the whole poem is devoted to the description of the horrors of the pogroms. The connection with the title is that Daniel fled from the wrath of the most cruel animal, Man, to the den of lions to find rest and security. There is a certain inventiveness in this thought but that

is all. The portrayal of the horrors has some strength but pales in comparison with such portrayals by a later poet, Bialik.

Some of his didactic poems however possess charm and captivate us by their fine poetic form and also by their brilliancy and the scintillation of thought displayed in them. This is true especially when the subject is not an historical one, as for example in his poem, *Mephistophel*, in which Mephistopheles appears to the poet as to Faust of old and bids for his soul. The poet wants to convey to us that while modern technique and inventions have improved our material existence, we are spiritually impoverished for we have lost our innocence and simplicity. He then goes in search of his soul and rummaging in the memories of his past, he recollects three episodes from his childhood and youth in which his soul was manifested. But he is doubtful of its existence at present. Besides, what can Mephistopheles offer in exchange for his soul? Youth, as to Faust? Of what value is it? It brings a storm of passion and restlessness of desire, but not calm and peace. This irony and criticism of modern life together with the romantic longing for the purity of feeling and innocence of the early days is expressed in beautiful verses and charming descriptions of episodes which make this poem one of Frishman's best creations. Charming is also another poem, *Agadot* (Legends) in which the incredulity of the young of the legends of the older people is contrasted with the incredulity of the old of the inventions of modern science. Two world outlooks which oppose one another. The charm consists primarily in the portrayal of the two episodes, the grandmother telling her stories, and the youngster, just returned from school, his.

In all these narrative poems of one kind and another, there is a lyric strain which considerably enhances their value. Frishman, however, also wrote a smaller number of purely lyric poems in which there is, on the whole, a note of tragedy, which arouses our sympathy. Here, the poet threw off the mask of lightness which as a rule he wears in his essays and feuilletons and faces the grimness of life. He had striven all through life to something noble and exalted, but the goal was ever hazy and nebulous. The innocence and naïveté of belief which he glorifies so much in his narrative and didactic poems were never his, and he felt their lack keenly. He therefore cries out in one of his earlier lyrical poems, *ha-Yadata* (Knowest Thou), "O, brethren, give me a God for I am full of prayer." And again, "O, give me a soul, for my

heart is full of love." His request was not granted, hence his sorrow at a life passed in storm without arriving at any port, and he moans:

Life was not day nor night
Only twilight.
That which was not
Nor will ever be
Was the goal I strove to.¹⁸

And as life passed on and winter slowly approached, the sorrow increased and the tragic note became louder and louder, but simultaneously it is expressed ever more and more beautifully. In this lies the charm of our singer's life, for even pain is dressed in beautiful garb and evokes a sympathetic chord in the heart of the reader, since all of us are subjected in a greater or lesser degree to a similar fate.

Frishman also translated many poems of Heine, Goethe, Byron, Rabindranath Tagore, and of other poets. He executed his tasks skillfully and with an exquisiteness of language and imagery.

In conclusion, we can say that with all the shortcomings of Frishman, he added some beautiful strands in the colorful web of modern Hebrew poetry, for beauty is stamped upon all of his songs, and especially upon their form. His mastery of the language and poetic technique, fine imagery, and sense of proportion and harmony all added to the value of his work and exerted great influence upon the younger poets who succeeded him.

28. *HAYYIM NAḤMAN BIALIK*

Of the poets hitherto discussed, each possessed a certain peculiar excellence and each contributed his share towards the rise of the poetry of the period to high levels. As a group, however, they were only forerunners and harbingers of the day of poetic glory which soon broke forth when on the horizon of Hebrew literature there appeared a bright and luminous constellation of poets, whose striking of the lyre evoked both sweet and powerful tones which thrilled and awed the souls of the children of their people. The central luminary or the sun of that constellation whose radiance often illumined that of the other bright stars was Hayyim Naḥman Bialik (1873-1934).

The Jews, as an emotional people, as a group whose tragic history and suffering instilled in their souls an inherent desire for poetic expression

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

especially of the lyric type, always had assigned a special role to the great singers of the race. Of all the books of the Bible, the Book of Psalms was the most popular and the most beloved by the great masses in all times. Of all the great men of the Spanish Golden Age, Judah ha-Levi was the most favored by the people in his time, and with the exception of Maimonides, he was best known in later ages. Still, seldom was admiration expressed by the people so profusely and warmly as in the case of Bialik. Seldom did a poet attain such eminence in Jewry, such wide-spread influence during his own lifetime as he. The phenomenon becomes more perplexing when we reflect that the period under discussion is the modern age, when times were turbulent, prose literature of all types and forms were widely read, poets were numerous, and the sphere of poetry in the general as well as in the Jewish world was narrowed considerably. Yet in spite of these hindrances, the fame of Bialik rose far above that of all other great writers of the period and his name penetrated even into circles where literature in general and Hebrew literature in particular were little known and appreciated. The homage paid him by the intellectual strata, and, to a degree, even by the masses resembled that of a cult. In his later years, he was the uncrowned leader of all whose Jewish consciousness was to a greater or lesser degree a factor in their lives, though he never held any official position in the Zionist or any other international Jewish organization. His judgment on all questions was authoritative, and his opinion was awaited with eagerness and received with enthusiasm. Not since Theodor Herzl was the death of an individual Jew considered a national catastrophe as was the case at the demise of Bialik. The number of articles, essays, pamphlets, and books written about the poet in all languages during his lifetime and in the few years since his death, if collected, would constitute a fair library.

What then evoked this adoration and love? What called it forth from a people which, in spite of the fact that personality played a great role in its life, was never prone to develop a cult of persons and often displayed indifference to the fate of the best of its sons. It is true that much of Bialik's popularity and the homage paid him is not to be attributed solely to his poetic genius but to his remarkable personality in general, to the brilliancy and genuineness of his thought, to his responsiveness to the needs of his people for he never dwelt on Parnassus but always in the midst of the camp of Israel, and still more to his extensive cultural activity as collector, editor, and publisher of Jewish

literary treasures. We must also take into consideration the fortunate circumstance of his settling in Palestine in his later years. It is true that the Palestinian settlement has as yet not succeeded in producing new values in Jewish life or a culture of great importance, nor has it as yet realized, even in a small degree, the dreams of Aḥad ha-'Am (Sec. 119) of becoming the hoped-for spiritual center of world Jewry. Still, due to the upheaval in Jewry caused by the great War and the subsequent events, this new settlement became the point of concentration for Hebrew literature, and consequently the level of intellectuality and spirituality of that settlement is comparatively higher than that of the other and larger Jewries. Bialik, by virtue of his great powers, dominated the Palestinian center, and even succeeded in capturing the love of the Jews of *Ereẓ Yisrael*, and this halo of glory with which he was surrounded in Palestine and the dominant position he held there generated a similar attitude among the Jews of the Diaspora.

Yet with all this, the key to the secret lies primarily in his poetry. It is there where we have to search for it; all the other qualities enumerated above were only contributory factors to the position occupied by the singer in Jewry. It was the peculiar poetic genius which was the source of his fame and to it we will now turn. However, a short survey of the life of Bialik will enable us to better understand and appreciate this fundamental expression of his soul.

Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik was born in the village of Radi near Zhitomir, an important Jewish community in the province of Volhynia. His father, Hirsch, served as supervisor of a small lumber camp in the near-by forest and gained therefrom a modest living for his large family. Ḥayyim Naḥman was the youngest child and the eighth in order, and his birth, as he tells us in his autobiography, was not hailed with delight by his parents. He was, therefore, left much alone in his early childhood which was distinguished by a tendency to dreaminess, an inclination to loneliness, and a strong desire for prying into the mysteries of the surrounding world of things. All of these qualities stamped him in the eyes of his parents, especially in those of his father, as a queer child, and he often paid dearly for his pranks. The natural scenery of the village was very beautiful, and much of that beauty, later reflected in his poems, was impressed upon the soul of the child during his habitual prowlings in field and forest.

At the age of six his parents moved to a suburb of the city of Zhitomir, where his father opened a small inn in which liquor was sold to the

passing peasants. The income from this rather unpleasant occupation was meager and poverty was a frequent guest in the home of the future poet. There young Ḥayyim Naḥman began to visit the Ḥeder and receive instruction. His early steps in learning were not very happy ones, his vivid imagination often leading him astray and beyond the comprehension of his prosaic teachers. There was, however, a teacher, Meir, of whom the poet speaks with love and admiration. The suburb, though a part of a large city, was really more of a village than a town, and the youngster was still in close communion with nature, the mysteries of which he never ceased to explore. Soon, however, a change came in Ḥayyim Naḥman's life for, at the end of his seventh year, his father died and his mother had to provide for the three children who were left with her. She must have engaged in some occupation which barely supplied even meager sustenance. Hardship and suffering were the result. In one of his beautiful poems, *Shirati* (My Song), the poet describes in stirring verse the sad impressions of this period of childhood as well as the tragic figure of his mother. These impressions were never obliterated from his soul. Tears, widowhood, and orphanage are motives and very frequent expressions in his songs and poems.

Finally, his mother, finding it difficult to maintain the youngster, brought him to the house of his grandfather who henceforth took care of him. The grandfather, who was financially fairly well situated but was a stern and prosaic man, trained his young ward with severity, and endeavored to restrain his impetuous spirit which broke forth from time to time in spite of his dreaminess. During the early years he suffered greatly from the dreariness of the house, from the longing for his mother, and from the stern supervision of the grandfather and other members of the family. His orphanage was a vivid reality to him and many times he cried bitterly at the memory of better days. On the other hand, he received instruction and absorbed the spirit of piety with which the house was saturated, for his grandfather was a pious Jew and a scholar who possessed an intense love for learning. Besides, the house was filled with books, and Ḥayyim Naḥman slaked his thirst for knowledge which developed in him early. Three inclinations, says the poet in his autobiography, were developed by him in those days, boisterousness in play, an occasional mood of quietude and contemplation of the world, and a passion for reading. This passion must have been very great and his voracity enormous, for his extensive knowledge of the

entire Jewish literature in the Hebrew language testifies to the wide acquaintance he acquired in early life. As he tells us, he actually swallowed books of all types—Agada, treatises on Halakah, ethics, philosophy, mysticism, as well as tales and stories, and also some Haskalah literature. He thus found his way to Haskalah without great struggle.

For a number of years until the age of thirteen, he studied under the direction of teachers, but after that he was qualified to study by himself, and accordingly did so in the synagogue of the suburb. He was the only student there during the day and a large part of the night, and this loneliness left a great impression upon the future poet. It is reflected in several of his stirring poems, such as *'Al Saf Bet ha-Midrash* (On the Threshold of the House of Study) and others. He speaks of that period in glowing terms and describes the state of his feelings in poetic language. We are informed that he was subjected to various moods. At times, when alone and undisturbed, he abandoned himself to dreams and visions, to thoughts on the purpose and aim of human life, to the future of the Jewish people as well as his own. Most of the time, though, he felt a kind of pride in the fact that he waged the battle of the Torah single-handed and that he, the young boy, continued the ancient tradition of study in spite of obstacles. In such hours he delved with zeal and emotion, especially during the night, in the depths of the "Sea of the Talmud," and within a few years, he became well versed in Talmud and Codes pursuing the latter subject several hours a day under the direction of the *Dayan* of the suburb.

During the time when he was free from all supervision and restraint he also read much of the Haskalah literature and even began to write poetry, in Hebrew, the only language he knew besides Yiddish. His reading aroused doubts in his heart as to the veracity of a number of religious beliefs and traditions, but it did not create a breach in his life, for he still continued to observe faithfully all religious precepts and he was still saturated with a deep love for and loyalty to Jewish tradition. It led, though, to a dissatisfaction with his studies, which apparently, as it seemed to him, were aimless, and to an aspiration to attend the Rabbinical Seminary at Berlin as well as to acquire the degree of doctor of philosophy. However, fearing to reveal his real purpose to his stern and pious grandfather, he asked for permission to attend the famous Talmudic Academy at Volozhin in Lithuania where he hoped to perfect himself in secular studies, for he had heard that such studies were

permitted there, and thus reach Berlin by way of the *Yeshibah*. The permission was reluctantly granted, and in the year 1890, Bialik, at the age of seventeen, entered the portals of the celebrated academy.

His short stay at Volozhin, about a year and a half, was fruitful for the development of his literary activity which began during that time. It did not serve him as a preparatory stage for his studies abroad as he had thought at first, but instead, his association with a number of students who were versed in the Hebrew literature of the day and were permeated with the national ideal leavened his spirit and inspired him with a desire to try his poetic wings and become a singer in Israel. At first, however, he devoted himself to the study of the Talmud assiduously, and for a short time was one of the distinguished students of the institution, but the spirit of enlightenment which dominated certain circles of students chilled his Talmudic ardor. He once more began to seek a purpose in life (*Taklit*), and finally decided to go to Odessa, at the time a center of literary activity and the place of residence of several famous writers, among them Asher Ginzberg (*Aḥad ha-'Am*). There he hoped to prepare himself for the study of a liberal profession. During his stay at the Academy he wrote a number of poems, among them *El ha-Zippor* and another which was the prototype of his later famous poem, *ha-Matmid* (The Diligent Student), but being too timid to send them to editors of magazines, he made his debut with an article instead in the Hebrew daily, *ha-Meliz*.

His first trip to Odessa was unsuccessful from a material point of view. He found little help and was unable to establish himself or to carry out his purpose of preparing himself for entrance to the university. He did, however, during the half year of his stay there, gain some knowledge of the Russian and German languages in which he perfected himself by reading their literatures voraciously. He was more successful in a literary way, as he made the acquaintance of *Aḥad ha-'Am* who, after reading some of his poems, advised Rabnizki, the editor of the annual, *ha-Pardes* (The Garden), to publish *El ha-Zippor*. Accordingly the poem appeared in the spring of 1892, and Bialik was thus launched on the path of poetic glory, for it made a great impression in literary circles with its remarkable style, intense national spirit, and poetic art. The encouragement which he received from the literary luminaries in the large city bolstered up his spirit and impelled him to write a number of poems, which he later published, during the few months of his stay.

His material situation, however, forced him to leave Odessa in the spring of 1892 and return to Zhitomir where he was married at the age of twenty-one to the daughter of S. Averbuk, a wealthy lumber merchant of Krostishow. Bialik, in those days, in spite of the approbation he had received at the appearance of his first poem, did not dream of making literature his career and settled down to the life of a small lumber merchant under the direction of his father-in-law. He was engaged in this business for four years in the forests around Krostishow in the province of Kiew. He did not, however, abandon his poetry, and from time to time, especially at the urgency of Rabnizki, his patron from the beginning and later his literary partner, he penned a number of poems of various types. While wandering among the stately pines of the forest and listening to the humming of the birds, and to the rush of the wind among the boughs of the ancient trees, the Muse rested upon him frequently, and led him to produce some of his most impressive poems, such as the '*Al Saf Bet ha-Midrash*, and several nature poems. Even the great narrative poem, *ha-Matmid*, was largely written in those years.

The poet, however, was not destined to be a merchant in spite of the fact that he always boasted of his business ability, and ultimately he lost his money and remained for a while without means. He then turned to the traditional occupation of Hebrew writers, namely teaching, and for three years from 1897 to the spring of 1900 he was engaged in instructing Jewish children at Sosnowizi in the province of Pietrikow, Poland. During that time he continued to write poems and his fame grew, and his reputation as the leading Hebrew poet was established by the publication in the monthly, *ha-Shiloah*, edited by Ahad ha-'Am, of his narrative poem, *ha-Matmid*, as well as many others. Still, his life in the small town was displeasing to him, and once more he turned his eyes toward Odessa. His wish was this time gratified through the mediacy of his patron and trusted friend, Rabnizki. In the spring of 1900 he was called by a group of public-spirited men to serve as teacher in the recently established modern Hebrew school.

From that time on his star began to rise. The poems which he continued to write in subsequent years among which were some of his best creations, and the several collections of poems which were issued at frequent intervals, carried his name to all ends of Jewry, and the translation of his poems into Russian and German made him known to literary circles in the non-Jewish world. His creative ability and literary energy

were constantly increasing and were not limited to the field of poetry alone but spread to other branches of literature. With the coöperation of Rabnizki, he established publishing houses, first the *Moriah* and later the *Debir* which in a period of twenty years issued numerous books in all literary fields including that of pedagogy, on all of which there is the stamp of the Bialik spirit, for he was editor as well as publisher. These activities made the name of Bialik a symbol for Hebrew culture and he was considered by all its typical representative. Bialik also tried his hand at the translation of famous works in world literature, such as *Don Quixote* by Cervantes and *Wilhelm Tell* by Schiller with great success. He also distinguished himself as a prose writer of stories and essays (Sec. 41).

During the great War and even in the first few years of the Soviet régime he continued his literary activity. It is interesting to note that the Soviet government which looked upon any Jewish national activity as counter-revolutionary, did not molest Bialik. However, he did not tarry for long in the land of the Soviets, and after spending a few years in Berlin, settled in 1923 in Palestine where he reorganized his publication house *ha-Debir* and for more than a decade played the role of leader and symbol of the cultural revival in the new center.

We have followed the course of Bialik's life through the first twenty-seven years in comparative detail, and have given the events of the greater part of his life subsequent to his settlement in Odessa rather briefly. This was done advisedly, for while his fame was acquired primarily in the latter period and his best creations both in prose and verse were also produced during that time, his talent and ability were formed and ripened during the earlier period. It was there potentially and only needed time for realization, for though the poet undoubtedly studied and perfected himself during the rest of his life, his mastery of the Hebrew language in all its nuances, shades and forms, the like of which had never been manifested before by any modern Hebrew poet and writer, the exquisite poetic art, the flight of the spirit and its genuineness are already noted in full bloom in the poems written before the Odessa period. The problem then arises, whence the mastery and power of expression, the intensity of feeling, and the affinity to what is so fundamental and elemental in the spirit of the nation? The secret must be looked for in the formative period of the poet's life. It is true that environment and education seldom explain fully the origin and unfolding of genius for many go through

similar experiences and accomplish little. Some of these things are still a secret and probably will remain so. Yet the life experiences, especially of the earlier period, often afford us a glimpse into the soul of a gifted man. In the case of Bialik, more than with any other poet or writer, the early impressions and experiences laid their indelible stamp upon the whole course of his literary activity. He always looked back to the life of these years and the very expressions and symbols and motives of his poetry are derived from it. It is true that we cannot explain his remarkable mastery of the Hebrew language by his auto-didactic and unsystematic study of it, but it becomes clearer to us by noting his voracious reading of all types of Hebrew literature for years during his adolescence, his immersion during his years of study in *Halakah*, Agada, pietistic books, and others. The similar immersion in the traditional Jewish atmosphere of his grandfather's home saturated with piety and love for Torah and everything Jewish, the years spent in solitary study at the synagogue, the short period at Volozhin where the best minds of young Russian Jewry joined in the glorification of the Torah, undoubtedly fostered the affinity with the spirit of the nation which had revealed itself in exactly these forms for over two thousand years. Bialik fortunately did not experience the struggles of other writers in his search for Haskalah, for he was raised at a time when the war of enlightenment was over, and thus even when he began to doubt and in his heart renounce some of the religious beliefs, no bitterness entered his soul, and love and admiration reigned there as before. The pangs of poverty experienced in early youth, his orphanage, the tears shed by his mother, and the restraint placed upon his vivacity in childhood, partly explain the tragic note in his poems and his thorough understanding of sorrow. We could continue to search for other influences but these will suffice for the glimpses into the soul which we are trying to gain. In his ode to the Torah, the *ha-Matmid*, he sings:

Luminaries of learning have arisen out of cellars
And *Geonim* have descended to us out of attics.

It is certain that the dwelling in cellars and attics was not the major factor in the development of the luminaries and the *Geonim*, but the strength of spirit, the willingness to suffer for the sake of the Torah and learning had much to do with it. Similarly, we can say that while these impressions and experiences of childhood and adolescence of our bard do not account for the source of his genius, nevertheless the spirit

permeating them fostered and nourished his soul, so that he became the Jewish national poet of our generation.

What is a national poet? The term is not to be taken in the narrow sense in which the word national is so often employed, namely a poet who, permeated with the spirit of national revival, sings songs of hope calling upon the people to rebuild the ancient land. There were many who sang such songs, and some with skill, yet that title was not bestowed upon them nor were they worthy of it. Besides, while it is true that Bialik was inspired by the Zionist ideal and wrote a number of poems of hope, these are not among the best of his creations, and on the whole, constitute but a small part of his poems. A national poet is rather one whose poetic eye penetrates into the depths of the life of the nation and reveals to us those forces in action which supply strength and stamina to the people in its struggle for existence; one through whose poems and songs the manifold life of the people is revealed in its numerous expressions; one who gives voice to its joys and woes, to its hopes and disappointments, achievements and failures, nay even to its very cry of despair and its impotent anger. The poet, through whom the spirit of the nation speaks, does not thereby lose his individuality, but on the contrary, the higher his genius rises in the scale of national expression, the more distinct is his individuality, for it is this distinctiveness which raises the bard above factions and parties and makes him the symbol of the nation as a whole, in whose poems and songs every faction and group find the reflection of their own thoughts and feelings. It is only that his individuality is so attuned to the spirit of the nation that even when the singer expresses the longing of his own soul, we are at a loss to discern who speaks thus, whether it is the voice of the lonely heart of the poet or of the nation. It was thus with the Psalmists and it is so with every truly national poet. Even the very description of nature, the palpitations of the poet's heart at the beauty of the world which he absorbs and assimilates, reflect to a degree the attitude of the nation towards the world of matter. Such a poet was Hayyim Nahman Bialik and of such nature is his poetry. When the poet exclaims,

I have not won the light from freedom's courses
Nor from my father's part
Came it to me; 'tis hewn from crags of mine,
I carved it from my heart.¹⁶

¹⁶ Collected Poems, p. 147.

we agree with him to a great extent but also differ with him. It is true that he did not acquire the poetic light as an ownerless thing, nor did he inherit it directly from his father, but part of it at least is an inheritance of countless generations of ancestors, and while that light was distilled and magnified by and through his heart until it shone in full glory we all share in some of its elements, for otherwise it could not penetrate our own hearts. He spoke for all Jews, for with all the differences among the Jews of the generation in views, attitudes, and opinions, each one of them finds in Bialik's poems an echo of his own thoughts and feelings.

The phases of Bialik's poetic creations are many, but on the whole, they can be reduced to the following: (a) poems expressing the silent but deep tragedy of a disintegrating Jewish life; (b) songs of hope; (c) elegies of woe and suffering; (d) poems of rebellion and wrath at the martyrdom of a nation. All these correspond to the main phases of the life of the nation. To these must be added (e) songs of nature and love; and (f) lyrics, reflecting the pain, sorrow, and the musings of the poet's own heart. It is under these headings that we will survey the creations of the national poet of Israel of our day.

As has been noted (Sec. 1), the real disintegration of the old type of Jewish life in the towns of the former Pale of Settlement where Russian Jewry lived began in the post-Haskalah period, in the eighties and nineties of the last century. The Haskalah with all the bitterness and bellicose attitude of some of its leaders against that type of life had only succeeded in denting the strongholds, but never in undermining their foundations. That work was left to the conditions of life itself and the effective results became evident simultaneously with the revival of the national ideal. It was during the eighties that the flight from the ghetto on the part of the young generation became a veritable exodus, that indifference to Jewish knowledge and ideals increased, that Jewish standards of living were abandoned and exchanged for those of the general world. In short, while the formal propaganda for assimilation and the call of the enlightened of the preceding generation to be like the other nations was checked by the pogroms in the early eighties and the subsequent government oppression, unconscious assimilation was going on in full swing.

Moreover, even the national movement which made its debut at the time did not in any way halt the process. Many of the leaders of that

movement were themselves totally assimilated in their mode of life and estranged from the Judaism which was lived and practiced by their generation. And while their return to their people and their striving for its revival was genuine, it was to a great extent superficial and not a true expression of their souls. The steps of the national movement were exceedingly slow; the orthodox leaders, whose judgment was still considered authoritative by the larger masses of Jewry, looked upon it with suspicion; and the masses themselves were too distracted by political oppression, by the hard struggle for economic existence and mass migration to pay attention to its ideals. Their very clinging to tradition was mainly mechanical, a matter of habit. The glow of religious fervor had begun to cool and the light of the Torah, which for ages had illuminated the "Tents of Jacob," had already dimmed though both were by no means extinguished.

There were then two tragedies, the external one, the result of discrimination, poverty, and pogroms and attacks which was apparent to everybody; and the other, the inner tragedy, which lay in the above-described disintegration of Jewish life and which, while more subtle, was none the less deep and pathetic, for there is nothing more soul-stirring than the sight of an ancient people slipping from its trodden path and finding no new one; losing the peace of soul, the support of confidence and swinging towards restlessness. Yet most of the writers and poets of the period did not appreciate the tragedy and did not express it in their writings. They were concerned with the external plight, and the more loyal of them imbued their people with the hope of restoration in the ancient land and became prophets of the new movement and sang the songs of Zion with more or less skill.

Only two people in that generation saw the tragedy of the inner Jewish life, the essayist, Asher Ginzberg (Aḥad ha-'Am, Sec. 119), and the poet, Bialik. The first, however, did not really express the tragedy. He noted it in his essays and spoke frequently of the decay of the spirit of the people (Hurban ha-Umah) demanding its revival as a necessary condition for the national movement and advocating the restoration of Jewish idealism, but he also attempted to supply that idealism with a new, a more secular and modern content. The tragedy per se in its deep pathos never found expression in his essays. This was left for Bialik who, though to a degree aroused to thinking by Aḥad ha-'Am whom he revered and always called master, yet felt much more deeply and more intensely the complexity of Jewish life

and the painful struggle of the soul of Judaism. He was no philosopher, no physician who sought to find a solution to the great problem, to prescribe a cure for the sick soul of his people—at least not in his poems—but the poet who gave voice to the woe, borne by countless loyal Jews who, like him were steeped in that life, to the anguish, often unexpressed, of thousands of yearning hearts for what is gone, probably never to return, to the sorrow and unshed tears at the sight of the crumbling of spiritual fortresses which still retain a faded beauty and tragic glory. All this and much more is expressed in that group of poems dedicated to the inner tragedy of the Jews, that of spiritual disintegration, written mainly during the first twenty years of his poetic activity. During these years, he also wrote other songs, of hope, of nature, and poems of wrath, but the string on his lyre which wailed and eloquently expressed the sorrow of the soul of Israel at the destruction of its sanctuary was constantly plied by the poet. Various, too, are the tones, at first sorrow and hope mingle; later the element of hope decreases, but is not banished entirely. Let us listen to the musing of the string.

We hear its first notes in a very early poem, *Mi Shub ba-Merhakim* (Return from Wandering), written in 1891 at the time when the youth left Volozhin for Odessa. He felt disappointment at the signs of incipient spiritual disintegration even in the very fortress of Judaism, in the great Academy, and while he himself left the citadel for the great world his subconscious soul longed for the spiritual peace of his childhood and adolescence. To these feelings he gave expression in that poem. Speaking of the images of his early life arising before him he exclaims:

Days of suffering, wandering, and exile
Obliterated not memories of old.

It is the memories of a complete life full of trust which he carries with him as he says, “as a seal on the heart” and he longs for the former peace of his soul. He knows that this life is stagnant, doomed to disappearance, yet so great is his longing for its stability that in a moment of despair he is ready, as he says in another poem, *bi-Teshubati* (My Return), to join its denizens and “rot together to total disintegration.” This longing for the former life of the nation which was narrow but complete, this search for the source of strength of the people is uttered with more vigor in the poem, *El ha-Agada*, in which

the bard expresses his desire to flee from the restlessness of the world of reality, from vain pursuit after fleeting shadows of ideals, and to seek comfort in the leaves of the Agada in which there still rustle the sad tones of the songsters of Babylon who knew the soul of the people. From these leaves he also derives the motives for his songs and is inspired with hope for the future of his people. Convinced that its power of survival will withstand all storms, he concludes the poem with the following words:

I understand the destiny of Israel, the worn nation
Shall overpower and outlive giants.¹⁷

These early poems voicing such longing for the older and more stable type of Jewish life express only the first stage of that tragedy, without presenting its pathos. But as years passed and the desolation in the House of Jacob increased, the intensity of the tragedy took hold of the poet and his voice became firmer and his soul, laden with anguish, uttered its cry in *'Al Saf Bet ha-Midrash*.

Standing on the threshold of the house of study which serves as a symbol for the entire Jewish life of the ages—for in the study of the Torah Jewish idealism reached its height—the poet describes the desolation reigning in the House of Israel. There flutter the cobwebs on the ceiling; broken is the roof, bent are the columns that support the dome, the walls are shaking. His heart contracts with pain and mournfully he asks:

Walls of the study-house, walls of the sanctuary,
Ye shelters of a mighty spirit, refuge of eternal nation,
Why are ye silent and despairing?

Do ye dream of days of yore,
Or do ye mourn for those that leave ye evermore?¹⁸

He waits for no answer but continues to depict the great tragedy. Many were those who left their nest to seek wider fields, hoping to find happiness there. However, victory was not theirs; some were crushed and some are still wandering in strange premises. Only he, the poet, came back from the battle-field to the sacred house of study not to tell the tale of defeat, but to find comfort in its walls, for he remembers that he left the house laden with spiritual goods, fruitful thoughts, and a heart full of confidence and trust. Much was lost in

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 35, 36.

the course of the battle; he lost much, but one thing he saved—his God—and that God saved him.

Here the poet rises to prophetic heights and in several exquisite stanzas, breathing with purity of faith and confidence in the exalted spirit of his people, he assures us of the ultimate victory of Israel, for truth must conquer, even if its path to victory is painfully slow. Triumphantly he exclaims:

Tent of Shem, thou wilt not totter
I will rebuild thee and thou wilt be rebuilt.

For did not the prophet say:

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth
But God shall stand forever." (Isaiah, Ch. XL, 8.)

Never had Jews in modern times heard such words portraying the tragedy of their life, breathing passionate love for Jewish idealism and permeated with such deep confidence in the spirit of the people, and in the God of their fathers. No wonder then that thousands of hearts responded to the feeling embodied in these verses hammered out by a master hand and tinged with the manifold colors and hues of the Agada.

The tragedy of Jewish life is vigorously emphasized, though indirectly in a later poem, *Im Yesh et Nafsheka le-Daat* (Dost Thou Want to Know). The *Bet ha-Midrash*, or rather the synagogue, which here too serves as the symbol of the old type of life is again the center of the poem, but it is not pictured in its desolation but as the source of strength of the nation, as the fountain of inspiration, as the loving mother who during the ages treasured the tears of her children and gave them comfort in their plight. He then advises the afflicted among his brethren to come to the humble synagogue, either in the long winter nights or in the hot summer days and there meet the remnant of his people who still study, pray, or chant the Psalms, for these are the guardians of the treasures of the soul of the nation, and he concludes:

Who knows but that the rivers of their tears
Have borne and brought us hither, and their prayers
Have loaned us of the Lord, and through their death
They bade life be ours, life to the world's end?¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

There is no more that certainty of hope which we meet in the earlier poem. True, there is love, admiration, and glorification of the fountain of inspiration and confidence in the continued existence of the Jewish people, but along with these there is also heard the note of sorrow that only a remnant still drinks of the well of the spiritual life of the people, and that only a spark is left of the sacred fire of old.

The tragedy deepens; more and more forsake the old way of life and emerge from the narrow confines of the ancient walls, and in anguish the poet sees himself in the poem, *Lebadi* (Alone), almost alone in the pristine fortress—the *Bet ha-Midrash*, alone with the *Shekinah*—the symbol of the Jewish spirit—who like him, mournfully moans:

The wind has borne them away; they all have flown
And I am but alone²⁰

But a time comes when even the poet loses some of his ardor for the ancient spirit of Israel, which as usual is symbolized by the House of Study or the treasured books. It may be only a mood, but there is pathos in it, for there is nothing more pathetic than when one stands before the God of his youth, formerly cherished and revered, and feels that his passionate devotion has abated. There is still reverence and awe, but the glow is gone. In such a mood we find Bialik in the poem, *Lifné Aron ha-Seforim* (Before the Book Case). He recalls the days of old when the faded and yellow books were all he knew and he pored over them day and night until a part of his soul was merged in their content. But now after years of wandering in the great world he stands once more before the case where the treasured folios are arranged only to find that their charm is gone. Doubt enters his heart that perhaps the clinging to the spirit of the past is in vain. The treasures of yore can no longer enrich the modern Jew. There seems to be a link missing between the old and the new. In despair the poet begs the stars to help him to find the way to peace of soul and mind. The stars are silent and he remains perplexed—perhaps the missing link is the pure religious faith which was the basis of the standard Jewish life and which the poet, like many other younger Jews, lost during his wanderings in the fields of foreign cultures.

Deeper and deeper the poet's eye penetrates into Jewish life and new phases are ever revealed to him. Even the attempt to revive the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

national ideal in modern and secular form did not prove successful. Too slow were the steps of the *Hobebé Zion* movement and too few were its adherents. The Jews were engrossed in their daily battle for bread and they had neither the time nor the patience to hearken to the voice of redemption. The poet then utters a cry of despair in the poem, *Oken Házir ha-'Am* (Verily the People Are Like Grass). The voice of God is calling, the national ideal demands action, but the people do not respond; the voice is calling in the wilderness and is silenced by the turmoil of the dance around the golden calf. Verily, exclaims Bialik in his prophetic wrath, thousands of years of exile and of wandering have left their mark upon the soul of the people. Groping in the dark for ages, it cannot strive towards light any more; used to the whip for centuries, it will not rise unless it be lashed; it will not awaken unless by violence. And thus the poet with bleeding heart lacerates the wounds of his own people and mournfully concludes:

Yea, when the trumpet sounds, when the standard at last is uplifted
There shall the dead arise, the dead awaken and tremble.²¹

The same bitterness at the indifference of his people, at the emptiness of their lives, and at their coldness and pettiness found more vigorous expression in the poems, *Al-Lebabkem she-Shamem* (Your Desolate Heart) and *Oken Gam Ze Musar Elohim* (Verily, This Is Also the Chastisement of God). In the first, the poet bewails the lack of idealism in Jewish life and the desolation of the heart and in his characteristic Jewish imagery he describes it thus:

In the ruins of your heart, the *Mezuzah** is contaminated
Therefore the demons dance and sing within the walls.

But worse than mere lightmindedness, says the poet, awaits you. Behind the door there lurks the beadle of ruined sanctuaries—despair—and when he will appear, mirth shall cease, and the last spark of the sacred fire which once warmed the House of Israel shall be extinguished. In the second poem, the most pathetic phase of the tragedy is expressed. In prophetic tones the poet tells his people of the chastisement of God which has befallen them. The best that there is in them is given to strange cultures, their very souls are staked as a pawn to others. They erect spiritual and intellectual structures for

²¹ Ibid., p. 75.

* The *Mezuzah*, a small scroll of parchment containing the holiest passages of the Pentateuch and placed on the post of the door was supposed to serve also as a charm against demons and evil spirits.

every nation on earth and sink in them the souls of their own children. One by one, the young eaglets, striving towards light, leave the old nest, and when their wings are grown, they fly high, straight to the light, but not a ray do they bring back to the desolate Tent of Jacob. There, coldness, barrenness, and poverty reign. In such pitiless and merciless language did the poet describe the tragedy of his people. There is, of course, exaggeration and poetic license, but there is much truth in what he said. The poem was written in the year 1905, when the spirit of freedom which was then sweeping over Russia was carrying away the most talented young men and women who were giving their energy to the cause of the liberation of Russia from the Czaristic regime and ignoring the national movement among their own people. The picture that Bialik drew was valid and will probably remain so as long as the Jews will be scattered through the world without a land and cultural center of their own.

The crown of this phase of creativeness is the narrative poem, *ha-Matmid*. In it the poet does not chastise, nor does he speak with bitterness, but paints with great love the Jewish world which in his time was already in the process of decay and of which only fragments remained. He also tells us of his deep longing and his unbounded admiration for its spirit, and his sorrow at its disappearance, and still more does he bewail the fact that the fruitful kernel of this spirit cannot bear fruit in a changed world.

This poem, though narrative and descriptive in form, is in reality an ode to the Torah, for with Bialik, as we have seen, the study of the Torah which was the highest expression of Jewish idealism is a symbol for the entire Jewish life of the ages. The *Matmid* is, therefore, the incarnation of two fundamental traits of the spirit of old, completeness of belief in the value of its own world-view and the whole-hearted devotion to the ideals of Judaism in spite of obstacles and impediments. The poem opens with a prologue wherein the type of the *Matmid* is described, his function as the guardian of the sacred fire of the Torah which is still smoldering in the corners of the ghetto. Thus:

There are abandoned corners of our exile,
Remote, forgotten cities of dispersion,
Where still in secret burns our ancient light,
Where God has saved a remnant from disaster.
There, brands that glimmer in a ruin of ashes,

Pent and unhappy souls maintain the vigil—
Spirits grown old beyond the count of time.²²

In the very first stanza we feel the note of struggle in the poet's soul. He loves and admires the world of his people, but at the same time he feels its narrowness, its excessive sternness, and lack of joy and mirth. This note of dualism runs through the entire poem. He then unrolls before us the life and world of the *Matmid*, both its ideal aspect and its tragedy. The description of the seclusion of the student and his singleness of purpose comes first. In the world without, things come and go during the long period of study, for "six years have passed since he set his face to the dark corners of the inner wall." But he is unconscious of the change, of the vicissitudes which take place in the lives of the other students of the *Yeshibah* who entered and left. He alone

Stays nailed and rooted in his place
For him no change or revolution comes—
The phantoms of years behind him pass,
The iron wall, yellowed leaves stand in front.

In the part that follows which is practically the body of the poem, the course of the day of the *Matmid* is described and is subdivided into several sections, some of which are more lyrical than descriptive, for the poet mingles his own thoughts and feelings with those of the student and often becomes the interlocutor. In the first section, the student's constancy, at the cost of struggle and sacrifice, is portrayed. The student rises before dawn, his eyelids are heavy with sleep, and they plead with him:

Brother, brother,
Have pity on the dark eyes under us;
And we are weary, for with thee we suffer.

He, however, is deaf to the plea; he passes his lean hand over them and winds his way to the *Yeshibah*. Again, obstacles confront him, the morning zephyr caresses his locks. He then

Lifts his strengthless hand as if in prayer
O, dear wind, take me from here
And find a place for me where I may rest;
For here is only weariness and pain.

²² Ibid., p. 287.

All this weakness, however, is only of momentary duration. Satan is overcome, the youth hastens to the *Yeshibah* and his voice soon rings out in the empty hall. The sun rises, nature awakens and with it the other students; the empty hall is filled, noise and movement go on all around him, but the youth is insensible to all this. He sees only the *Gemarah* before him and he pours out his soul ceaselessly in the mournful tune of *Oi, Oi, Omar Rabba, Omar Abayya*. Here the poet interferes, unable to withhold his admiration at the remarkable power and strength and exclaims:

Granite is yielding as clay as compared with him,
A Jewish boy unto the Torah vowed.

In his enthusiasm he queries

Is this the smithy then, is this the anvil
Where a people's soul is forged? Is this the source
From which the life blood of a people flows?

Who filled these pages with undying magic?
Whence comes the power that makes his mildewed words
Light flames of passion in a heart outlived,
Strike living sparks in eyes that are extinguished?

The poet then goes on to describe the day of the *Matmid* through its natural divisions, afternoon, sunset, and night. The sun sets, the students disperse; empty again remains the hall, but he is still there and his voice rings on through the lonely air in the night. The bard continues the lay and the tragic aspects of the *Matmid's* toil. He detects the struggle of the boy in his mournful tune. To him it seems that it carries the sorrow of a lost life, devoid of joy and youth. Yet at the same time he feels that there is much light and joy in the dark corner for,

The mighty Torah, the immortal light,
Has always sought dark corners for itself.
From the womb of darkness to the light of day
Successive generations bring her forth,
A heritage beneath the hand of God.

Besides there is also compensation for the toil for in vision the youth sees the day when, endowed with the crown of the Torah, he will return home and shine in glory, and he anticipates the joy of his parents and the pride of his community.

The poet, however, does not share entirely the joy and the satisfaction of the *Matmid* and in his concluding section he expresses his sympathy for those lonely immured souls whom he knew in his youth. His heart cries out:

Lord of the world
To what end is the mighty sacrifice?

He loves the student, he feels in him the source of strength, the sound kernel, but he also feels that times have changed and Jewish life has become a parched field. He pleads for a spirit which should instil life and productivity in these kernels and for the time finding none, exclaims;

How burned, how blasted must our portion be
If seed like this is withered in its soil.²⁸

The *Matmid* is one of the best creations of Bialik and he himself considered it so. It is the epic, in a general way, of the Jewish hero of the ages, the warrior of the Torah. We admire the strength of character, we are charmed by his idealism, by the nobility of soul, but like the poet, we cannot divest ourselves of the tragic note in that heroism. And yet even now, even later when no vestiges of such *Matmidim* remain, this poem will still stand forth as a monument to a hero whose sword was the word of God and whose shield the study of the Torah.

There is, however, another phase to the poem, a symbolic one. It was never emphasized by the poet in his letters, nor by the critics. It seems to the writer that the *Matmid* serves also as a symbol of the Jewish people, who like the student, stood in a corner of the world, wholly devoted to their ideals with a remarkable constancy in spite of all obstacles and suffering. The life of the student is to a degree also the life of the people, and their tragedies are similar. When that corner was invaded and destroyed then the tragedy of the people began. It needs, like the *Matmid*, a spirit which should make the source, the kernel of our own culture, fruitful in a barren world.

Jewish suffering is almost as ancient as the Jewish people, and it therefore served from time immemorial as a theme for poets. In the Psalms we hear the cry of the martyred nation pleading to its God for help. The cry of anguish from the lips of a people exposed to tortures of body and soul is the very warp and woof of Mediaeval Hebrew

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 288, 291, 293, 294, 296, 302, 307, 308.

poetry, and even in modern times it has formed the theme of many a fine poem. However, even the best theme becomes trite by much usage, and suffering was such a frequent phenomenon that even the Jews became insensible to it, until Bialik came out and with poetic fervor uncovered the living wounds to the sight of all so that they might see them and be stirred to rage, to protest against an indifferent world, and even against God Himself. This is the new note in our poet's songs, that of rebellion. He who had shed tears many times in his young life, knew that mere crying does not move as he says himself in one of his early poems, *Hirhure Lailah* (Night Thoughts).

My lament grown old with years
Is too weak to meet the stony hearts of men.

He therefore does not cry but rages, gnashes his teeth, roars with pain, and describes Jewish misery and human cruelty with such vigor that the words penetrate even hearts hardened with many trials and tribulations. That roar of pain did not break forth immediately, but gradually gathered strength until it could be restrained no longer. In the above-mentioned poem he bewails the Jewish fate in the traditional manner but with what force and vigor, thus:

Within the womb God consecrated me
To sickness and to poverty, and said,
Go forth, find thy vanished destiny.
Among the ways of life buy air to breathe
And steal with craft a beggar's dole of light.²⁴

In these few words which are more true today than forty-six years ago when they were uttered we have the entire Jewish situation, for are not millions of Jews in Eastern and Central Europe scanning the horizon for a place where they might have free air and light without molestation? Then there came the Kishinew pogrom which was distinguished by brutality and inhuman cruelty, and the first roar escapes the poet in his *Al ha-Shekitah* (On the Slaughter). It is still subdued but its muffled rumbles, saturated with a tone of defiance arising from deep despair, reveal the bleeding wounds. The poet, departing from the traditional way of pleading to his God, flings his doubts in the face of the Almighty and begins his dirge with the following words:

²⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

Heavens, entreat for mercy in my name
 If there is God in you, and to that God
 Speak prayers in my name.
 For dead is my heart and no prayer on my lips.

No prayer for mercy for its availability in heaven is doubtful and on earth it is futile. Instead there is defiance of despair

Headman, here is my neck, Come strike it through
 Neck me like a dog, the axe is in your hands.
 And the whole world is my block
 And we—we are few.

The despair of the poet, however, is of the present and not of the distant future for he rises in his rage and exclaims:

Cursed be the one who cries, "Vengeance for this—
 Vengeance for the blood of little children
 The devil has not framed.
 The blood will pierce the abyss
 To the gloomy depths the blood will worm its way
 Devour in darkness and grow upon the earth's foundations."²⁵

The full storm of pain and anguish, at the decay and agony of a nation martyred and tortured for ages, breaks forth in fury in the poem, *be-'Ir ha-Haregah* (In the City of Slaughter*) written under the impressions of the same pogrom but published a year later. The poem, though largely descriptive and concentrated on the gruesome sights of the massacre in that city, is the veritable cry of pain of all ages. Never, not even in the Mediaeval Golden Age of Hebrew poetry, was such a scroll of suffering written. The descriptions are blood-curdling; the cry of rage, greater because it is impotent and soul-piercing, and the despair, the galling irony, the protest against the hallowed God of Israel, the vehement reproaches against his own brethren, the mangled and maimed, are heart chilling. The full effect of this poem cannot be obtained unless one reads it in the original in its hammered-out style and slow-moving, and weighty rhythm. We will, however, attempt to give some conception though an inadequate one of its sombre and gloomy content.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 165, 166.

* The original name of the poem was *Ma'asa Nemirov* (The Burden of Nemirov) a city in the Ukraine, where in the great massacres in the years 1648-49 about ten thousand Jews were put to death by the revolting Cossacks. The name was assumed because of the fear of the censor. It was later changed to the present title.

The poem is divided into two parts of unequal length. The slightly larger part is primarily devoted to a description of the horrible sights, and the other, to rage, protest, and reproach. The first part begins in a prophetic tone. The poet hears a voice saying:

Of steel and iron, cold, hard, and dumb
Now forge thyself a heart, O, man, and come
And walk the town of slaughter. Thou shalt see
With walking eyes, and touch with conscious hands.

Then follows, in the form of a prologue, the description of the sights in the streets of the pogromed city, the shattered walls, broken hearths, the air thick with flying feathers and trampled leaves and parchments torn from holy books and scrolls of the Torah. But what pains his soul most is the indifference of nature to the inhuman crimes committed in these streets. It pours its charm alike on the murderer and the murdered and with venomous irony he says:

"The Shohet slaughtered
The knife was sharp and glistened, from the wound
Flowed blood and gold."

The indifference of nature, the idea that most heinous crimes leave no permanent mark upon the world, that blood leaves no indelible stain, stirs the poet, and the wail is repeated at the end of a number of sections at the erasure of the effects of the great crime. He then begins his gruesome description in systematic order; from the streets he enters the yards where both Jews and dogs lie dead. He climbs the attics and relates in terms as sharp as the blade of a knife the bloody tragedies which took place there where the Jews had hid themselves, calling for witness the black spiders in the corners who saw with their numerous eyes the tortures, and again he exclaims:

And calmly like today and yesterday,
The sun will rise to-morrow in the East
Its splendor not diminish in the least.

From the attic he descends to the cellar and recreates the scenes of the inhuman orgies of rape and murder in stirring lines and concludes again with the words

Oh, all will be restored as before
And order will reign once more.

Scene then follows scene, each one increasing in horror. In all these descriptions there are no tears, but unspeakable grief which the poet mingles with reproaches against the unfortunates in hiding who saw the indescribable agonies of their nearest and dearest and did not commit suicide or go mad from anguish. But his pain is intense and seeks some outlet. The poet therefore concludes the first part of the description with this remarkable passage:

Hush, go thou softly now and shut the doors
 And eye to eye remain with grief alone,
 And let its burning wrongs and aching griefs
 Forever interpenetrate thy soul.
 When all within thee died away to silence,
 Go touch its wounds and they will leave and speak.
 Then bear its woes' remembrance in thy breast
 To all the confines of the whole wide world
 And seek a name for them and find it never.

The second part consists of a series of visits to the cemetery, the synagogue, and memorial prayer meeting, but contains little description. The restrained cry of the poet, the gnashing of the teeth now express themselves in protest against the God of Israel and against the people themselves for their meekness and insensibility. Protests to God for Jewish suffering had been made before but none so bitter and in a way blasphemous although the poet can be forgiven on account of his grief. He makes God Himself say to the dead:

Forgive your God, ye that are ashamed forever!
 For all your dark and bitter lives forgive me.
 And for your ten times bitter and dark death
 For I am poor myself, I am beggared also.

He then turns to his brethren and with bitter invectives lashes them for commercializing their misfortune and begging for contributions instead of rebelling against their fate and destiny. In fact, the poet does not exactly explain what he would like his unfortunate brethren to do. It is only in the overflow of pain that he chastises everybody. The poet is conscious of the fact himself for he concludes the poem with the following lines:

Now flee, O son of man, forever flee,
 And hide thee in the desert—and go mad!
 There rend thy soul into a thousand pieces

And fling thy heart to all wild dogs for food.
 The burning stones shall hiss beneath thy tears
 And stormy winds shall swallow up thy cry!²⁸

Thus ends the great scroll of suffering which reveals the Jewish fate in all its depth of misery to the world, for the poem was translated into a number of European languages. And though it contains not a single ray of hope and there is not a word of comfort in it, its effect upon the Jews was instantaneous and beneficial for immediately after its publication there were formed in many cities in the Pale of Settlement societies for self-defense which saved Jewish dignity. There were numerous pogroms after that of Kishinew, but in most of the cities Jewish blood and honor was not bought as cheaply as in the first attack. Seldom did a poem affect life as this one. A spark of the fire which permeates it had entered the hearts of thousands of Jews at the time.

As a sequel to the poems described there are a number of others in which the bard pours forth his accumulated anger at the fate of the nation for which he sees no hope, but he visions a time when it will be revenged. There is no description in these poems, and the tone is prophetic. In two, written in the year 1906, a year of great suffering for the Jews of Russia, when the early revolution was drenched in Jewish blood, *Kiru le-Nehashim* (Summon the Serpents) and *Yadati be-Lel 'Arafel* (In a Dark Night), the cause of his wrath is again Jewish suffering, but not so much the physical pain as its effect upon the soul of the nation and humanity at large. In the first, the depth of spiritual agony is summed up by the refrain which, though varied, contains the same thought. No human agency can make known to the world the extent and intensity of the sorrow and wrath accumulated in the soul of a martyred people, but other means must be used; he therefore cries out:

Call the serpents and let them carry your wrath
 To the ends of the earth.

And again:

Cry out to the eagles to carry your cry
 To the heights of heaven.

And finally:

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 320, 321; 326, 371.

Cry out to the clouds to carry your tears
To the limitless sea.

In the second, the prophetic note is heightened. The poet sees no hope during the present generation, but moved by the spirit of truth and justice he is confident that the sorrow, though for a time unheeded, will penetrate nature itself and that the violence done to the Jews will be interwoven into the social fabric of humanity and delay the redemption of the world from sin and evil. Nay, even the sun will reflect the sorrow, and the stars will tremble at the evil, and ultimately the God of revenge will come forth with his mighty sword to avenge the desecration of truth and perversion of justice.

In *la-Menazeah 'Al ha-Meholot* (The Choir Dance) we have a peculiar poem of wrath. It was written at the beginning of the World War when thousands of Jews were being driven out from the border provinces of Russia and were wandering over the Empire in search of refuge and shelter. The tone is that of satire and irony which pierces the soul to its depths. The poet calls for a dance of despair, even the dance of death. All is lost; no shelter, no food; no roof but the sky; no light, but the sun and moon; but, says the mocking voice of the poet: "The guardian of Israel will surely not forsake His people and will feed them as He feeds the ravens and dogs; Halleluyah then, and on with the dance." He sums up the situation in the verses:

No justice, mercy, law nor recompense among
His creatures. Why be still? Give to the dumb—a tongue!
Give to your foot a mouth and let it flame and roar.
Beat out your tortured cry upon the pebbles on the floor.²⁷

With all this tragedy and bitterness accumulated in the heart of the poet, he is not insensible to the new ideal of revival and hope. In fact, he began his poetic career with the nationalistic poem, *El ha-Zippor*, and through the first decade of his activity he wrote about a dozen poems of hope. It was only later when his keen eye penetrated deeper into life and it was revealed to him in all its misery that he gravitated more and more towards the expression of other phases. For the very reason that Biālik cannot divest himself entirely of the burden of his heritage, even his poems of hope contain a note of sorrow. There is no complete optimism in them, but always a strain of grim reality. The fundamental trait of the Jewish spirit is its serious attitude to life

²⁷ Ibid., p. 236.

and this seriousness permeates all the poems of the poet with the exception of his nature poems. He sees the future in an aura of light but never forgets the present full of shadows.

In the *El ha-Zippor* he utilized the bird motive which, as indicated by us (Vol. III, Sec. 40), was often used in Hebrew poetry. It is national in content, for he asks the bird to tell him of the glories of the ancient land; it expresses little hope. It is more of a wish than a real belief. The spirit of the poem is summed up in the last stanza which reads thus:

Though time that ends has not ended
The ancient tale of my wrong,
Yet blessed art thou in thy coming
And happy shall be thy song.²⁸

A more cheerful spirit and a real note of hope is felt in *Birkat 'Am* (The Blessing of a People). The bard is not enthusiastic about the accomplishments of the national movement, but he knows its value and welcomes the small beginning. He calls vigorously, "Who despiseth the day of small things? Contempt for the scoffers!" and he waits for the day when the divine voice will be heard from the mountain-tops calling the entire people to rise for redemption.

The poem, *Mikroē Zion* (The Assemblies of Zion), dedicated to the first Zionist Congress at Basel, evaluates its importance correctly. It was not the famous Basel program, adopted at that gathering, which imparted value to the Congress, but the call for unity of the people, the declaration before the eyes of the world of the desire for redemption and proclaiming openly the misery of the Jews. The poet sums up the historic role of that Congress in the line:

There is no redemption yet—but our redeemer liveth

and by this he means the will of the people to be redeemed as expressed in that assembly.

The more vigorous spirit of the new Zionist movement under Herzl aroused real hope in the heart of the poet and the few national poems written during the early years of Zionism breathe strength and genuine belief. This new spirit reached its climax in the last poem, *la Mitnadbim be-'Am* (To the Peoples' Volunteers), where the poet reiterates his belief in the inner strength of the people. He calls for offers

²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

on behalf of redemption; no offer is too small; every spark of light, every atom of energy should be collected and stored up; and true to the Jewish spirit which always valued light as the great gift, he concludes:

Oh, children of the Macabees!
Arouse your people, endow your generation with might,
Uncover the light, uncover the light!

Light is also a leading motive in his nature poems. Of the dozen poems dedicated to the glories of nature, light in its various forms is the main theme in at least nine of them. He is intoxicated by its splendor, gleam, and motion, and he longs for it from the depths of his soul. It symbolizes to him both beauty and goodness. In this we may see an unconscious national trait, for light played a very important role in Jewish literature and life. The very first act of creation was the bringing forth of light and all through the Bible it is used as a symbol for many good and desirable things, such as redemption, purity from sin, and even life itself. The Psalmists are constantly pleading to God that He give them light or turn his lighted face upon them, or brighten their way in life. And who knows but that the elemental desire of a people whose fate often threw thick shadows upon its path was communicated through inheritance also to the poet and moved him to glorify that great gift of God.

Bialik is no mean poet of nature. Yet he is on the whole limited to only a small corner of its vastness and does not grasp it in its full grandeur and sublimity. Nor does the harmony manifested in its complexity occupy any place in his poems. Besides, the repetition of the light motive which imparts a certain monotony to his songs, there is almost complete absence, with few exceptions, of description of the beauties of plants and animals, of the sea in its manifold colors, its calms and storms, and of the mountains in their towering height. He seems to be limited to only a small part of inanimate nature and even then he is charmed only by certain of its phases. Static beauty does not captivate him; inanimate nature in motion alone seems to interest him. The motion, however, is more of the ordinary and usual, and not the exceptional. The storm, the howling wind, the raging elements of nature find little space in his creations. Still in that great corner of nature which he reserved for himself, he displays great skill and genuine poetic feeling. He excels especially in description which is de-

tailed and manifests keen power of observation. Much of the beauty of that description is due to his power of language, to the rich imagery of words and the skilful employment of nuances. There is also an attempt to Judaize nature and express its beauties in Biblical and post-Biblical similes and metaphors which, from the Jewish point of view, add much grace to the work.

His first nature poem called *Al Ayelet ha-Shahar* (On the Dawn), written in imitation of Judah ha-Levi, describes the rise of dawn which chases away the dreadful shadows of night and awakens life into activity. This struggle between day and night is also the subject of another poem, *ba-Arob ha-Yom* (The Passing of Day), in which the poet, saturated with the beauty and light on hill and dale, dreads the oncoming of the shadows of night and says to himself:

“Dost thou grieve to see
The darkness conquer light?”

The answer, of course, is in the affirmative, for these two symbolize to him good and evil.

His enthusiasm for light and sunshine is especially expressed in the poems, *Zafririm* (Morning Sun Rays) and *Zohar* (Splendor). In the first we see his joy at the dance of the early sunbeams in his room. With childish glee he expresses his ecstasy at their reflection wherever they fall, whether on the smooth surface of the water, or in the smile of a sleeping child, or in the cheek of a pretty maiden, or in the heart of a loving mother. He grows more and more enthusiastic and he calls to the sunbeams to envelop him and penetrate his soul so that he be immersed in them. The second poem, a hymn to light, is exquisite in describing the beauty of the world on a bright summer morning. He begins by telling us of his longing from early childhood for the light of the world. The body or the matter of the world interested him little but the splendor which reveals the hidden beauty in every particle of nature captured his fancy. This is followed by a wonderful description of the march of light and sunbeams from early dawn until high noon. Scene after scene of the effect of light on the flowers, butterflies, and other insects, birds and mammals, their revelling in it, and their joy pass before us in charming array. Finally, there is the last scene of the play of light upon the pond enclosed in the stillness of the forest and the reverse reflection of the world around it in its still waters. This scene is of exceptional beauty, but curiously enough it is repeated

with only few changes by Bialik in another poem devoted entirely to the pond. The whole poem instills in us a thirst for light and beauty of nature. The effect, however, is spoiled by the closing stanza where a note of sorrow is inserted. We are told of the change in the poet's soul through which the song of splendor was suddenly silenced forever and grim reality faced him, so that he felt the life-giving light of the sun no more but only its heat.

The crown of his nature poems is the *ha-Bereka* (The Pond). In it Bialik's powers of description and his sense of beauty reached their height. It is the same pond referred to in the *Zohar*, the one enclosed among the tall oaks of the forest. The *Bereka*, the longest of his nature poems, is divided into two parts. The first contains portrayals of four phases of the beauty of the pond under different natural conditions, in the morning, on a moonlit night, in a storm and at dawn. Each of these sections is a gem of natural beauty for not only is the pond portrayed but the forest surrounding it as well. It is the one time that the poet described the charm of night. The imagery is superb and the description detailed. Very vigorous is the description of the storm, for it is both inspiring and symbolic. When telling of the dark face of the pond in the storm, he remarks:

Who knows
Is it the fear for the pride of the forest,
For the fall of its glorious crowns?
Or is it the sorrowing for the beauty
Of its own world
Of clear dreams and bright colors
Which the wind disturbed and confused,
In one moment shattered it to naught?

Do not these lines remind us of many beautiful worlds of dreams and hopes of a life time which were destroyed and overturned in moments of storms?

The second part is devoted to the poet's reflections while sitting at the shore of the pond and drinking in its beauty. He is especially affected by the two worlds, the one above, and the one reflected in the crystal waters of the lake, by the sun in its zenith in the sky and by the sun at its nadir, the bottom of the pond. He tells us that at that moment he began to understand the voiceless language, the very language of the universe—that of color, of beauty which is found everywhere in the blue of the sky, in the darkness of the thick clouds,

in the greenness of the mighty cedar, in the spread of the powerful eagle's wings, and in the charm of the human body, for in that language, concludes the poet, the pond spoke to me. We cannot leave this grand poem without remarking upon its exquisite style which possesses a peculiar Oriental charm. Here is an example:

"And hovering o'er the wood
As though to leap
A heavenly troop—a multitude of clouds
The mists of morning—honored guests
In form like princely delegates,
Elders of the Most High
Carrying scrolls—decrees,
The wrath of a Great King
From one world to another."²⁹

Bialik also wrote other nature poems of great beauty, notable among which is the cycle *mi-Shiré ha-Horef* (Winter Songs). The brightness of the snow and the vigor which the cold instills in the soul are their impressive features. In conclusion, we want to note his fine poem, *Rosé Lailah* (The Secrets of the Night). Our poet, with the one exception mentioned, has no eye for the beauties of the night, but he has an ear for its secrets, for the mystery which is being created in the night and the description in that poem is both noble and thought provoking, thus:

What mean the wonderful voices
Fading in the distance?
Whose sigh do they carry as secret,
Whose passion or hope do they bury?
Does a silent complaint expire in them
Or are they the quiet chant of a pure prayer?³⁰

These and many more questions are asked by the poet to which he receives no answer. Of one thing he is, however, assured by the spirit of the night, that in the universe as a whole not even one breath is entirely lost.

Bialik may see but a limited part of nature but in that limited sphere of his he exhibits a richness and beauty which both overwhelm and inspire us.

Bialik also wrote several love poems, rather few in number, but this

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 335, 336.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

species of poetic creativeness is not his fort  . In general, his love poems are reminiscences of a past love more than the expression of a burning passion for a being of charm and beauty. In fact, in one of his most popular love poems, *Haknisini Tahat Knofe  a* (Shelter Me Beneath Your Pinions), the bard asks:

There is love, they say, to garner
Love, what is thy name?

The result is that the actual passion for human beauty and the desire to unite with the beloved is hardly expressed in these poems. Of the entire body it is the eyes and the light reflected in them which attract him, and in general, it is more the spiritual type of love which he longs for than the physical one. Woman to him is a symbol of nobility, purity of soul, and rest. It is not the satisfaction of stormy passions which he expects to find, but shelter from the storms of life, and in the above-mentioned poem, he appeals to his chosen one, to be his mother and sister and impart to his soul peace and quiet. The vigor of the poems lies in the style, which is, on the whole, one of the most important elements in Bialik's poetry and bestows upon it beauty and charm.

There are a number of poems by Bialik which are permeated by a deep and pathetic spirit of lyricism, and which for want of a better name we will call personal poems because the theme is the poet's own soul and his own feelings, and in fact, in several of them he strongly asserts his individuality. It seems that the title "national poet," which was bestowed upon Bialik early in his career and employed in a narrow sense as if to say that he is merely the spokesman of the nation and has little of his own, aroused in him an aversion and he therefore protests vigorously in two of his poems, saying:

I did not acquire the light from freedom's courses
Nor from my father's part
Came it to me; it's hewn from crags of mine,
I carved it from my heart.

One spark is hid in the fortress of my heart
So small but mine alone;
I asked it of no man, I stole it not.
'Tis in me and my own.⁸¹

And in the other poem, he concludes emphatically:

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 147.

There is only one world for me
The world is my heart!⁸²

Yet, as was already indicated by us, it seems that while much of that light was the poet's own, he inherited or borrowed a large part of it from the environment and only purified and brightened it in his own soul.

Through these personal poems there runs a tragic note, the result of a series of experiences. These are the poverty, misery, and loneliness which he endured during his childhood and youth; his disappointment at the indifference of his people to the call for revival, for a better, normal, and productive life; and finally, the purely individual inner grief at his own sorrows in life, at frustrated desires, stunted strivings, and goals unattained.

The suffering of childhood is the theme of his early poems, *be-Yom Setaw* (In an Autumn Day) and *Shirati* (My Song). In the first he bewails his youth which was as gloomy as an autumn day, dark and dreary, and it is the vision of that age which was never forgotten and gave a sorrowful tinge to that spirit. The second, which is more powerful, is a narrative poem describing that bane of Jewish life in the ghetto—poverty. The poet tells us whence he inherited his song. He learned it, he says, from the lonely poet in his father's house, the cricket, bard of poverty. He then describes at length in stirring terms the gloomy life in the house of his parents—the cheerless and meager Sabbath meal, the dreary cold winter nights, and finally, the widowhood of his mother. It is, he concludes, from the bread baked by his mother in which were mingled her tears that his sigh originated.

These experiences may have been common to most of the poet's contemporaries but when they are revealed to us through poetic glow and depth of feeling of the poet's soul, they assume a different form and reflect a part of the great sorrow which fills the world. Likewise, is the disappointment at the failure of his message reflected in a number of his poems.

This group of individual or personal poems was written in the decade of 1900-1910, a time of depression in Jewish life in Russia when the first outburst of enthusiasm for the new Herzlian Zionism had begun to cool and the younger generation was greatly influenced by radical and socialistic ideas. At the time a crisis took place in the poet's soul. He felt that his work was in vain and that his mission lay in another direction, in the expression of his own soul. He became

⁸² Ibid., p. 146.

introspective. But here the tragedy began; his real dreams and longings are never revealed and instead we have assertions of the richness of his own world as compared with the poverty of the life around. He tells us, as we have seen in the poems mentioned above, that even when the world is silent, his heart is eloquent, that a pure fountain of inspiration bubbles there, and that he possesses only one world, the one in his heart. Again, he informs us that the light is all his, and that whatever glow there is in Jewish life is due to his spark. This outburst of confidence, however, does not last; he feels that with all his richness he has accomplished little, and pity for himself grows and he expresses his grief in two lyric poems, *Aḥaré Moti* (After My Death) and *we-Hayah Ki Timẓeu* (When You will Find). The motive in both is the same. In the first he tells us what people will say after his death, that here was a poet whose real song, the melody, the note which he longed to express during all his life was never expressed and death caught him all too soon and interrupted the song of his life. In the second, prayer takes the place of the song. All his life long the poet prayed for some wish to be granted, but the prayer was not fulfilled nor ended, and death came in the midst of devotion.

This grief of the bard is at times expressed in more pessimistic verses, such as those of the poem, *Lo Herani Elohim* (God Did Not Tell Me), in which the singer speculates on the manner of his death, whether his soul will expire in a blaze of glory like the setting sun, or will be extinguished in a lonely spot like a flickering candle without notice or attention, or whether he will die during life and he himself will recite the Kaddish. All these possibilities indicate the depth of sorrow and perplexity in which the poet found himself during these years when most of the lyrics were written. At times he masks his disappointment by throwing the responsibility for the failure on the generation as in the poem, *Hoze Lek Braḥ* (Seer, Flee), in which he asserts his consciousness of his power, and says:

And if my strength is spent in vain,
I'm not to blame
'Tis your sin! Bear the iniquity;
My hammer found no anvil for its blow,
My axe struck but the soft rot of a tree.²⁸

Yet he does not despair; he shall, he tells us, withdraw into the province of his own soul and there continue his dreams. In all these

²⁸ Ibid., p. 221.

poems the tragedy of his soul is the theme; only once in the short poem *Kokobim Mezizim we-Kobim* (Twinkling and Falling Stars), does he touch upon the sorrow of life in general or what the Germans call the "Weltschmerz." He bewails that the light in the life of men is only ephemeral and that darkness ultimately settles upon the heart, bright dreams rise and fade, hopes bloom and perish, and prayers fail. Still we feel that even the personal sorrow of the poet reflects the grief of all men, for none of us attain life's desires and express the note we would like to express in our humble way, nor do we complete our prayer. It is always interrupted in the middle.

We finally reach the last phase of his creativeness, the historical narrative poems, the first of which is the *Meté Midbar* (The Dead of the Wilderness). The motive of this poem is based on a legend mentioned in the Talmud that the generation of the Exodus who, as told in the Bible, were of a rebellious nature, and who by the decree of God perished in the desert, lie petrified in a secret nook somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula. It is on the basis of this short tale that Bialik created this poem which can possibly be considered his masterpiece. In it he passes beyond the bounds of the beautiful into the realms of the sublime. The panorama unveiled before us of the dead rebels lying in the hot desert together with the colorful description of the desert itself in its various moods and different times, contains both grandeur and pathos carrying us away into another world and another time.

The poem contains a number of parts. The first describes the petrified bodies, the strength revealed in their features, nay even the spirit of wilfulness and rebellion which are engraved in their stony faces, thus:

Strong are their faces and burnished and darkened to bronze are their
eyelids,
Targets to arrows of sunlight and rocks to the fury of tempests.
Hard are their foreheads and grim and changeless upturned to the
heavens.

Again:

Cast as lava upthrown from volcanoes and hardened
Their breasts are.
Lifted like anvils of iron that wait for the blow of the hammer;
Yet though the hammer of time beats long and unceasing upon them
Like to the stone that enfolds it, the strength of their hearts sleeps
forever.

This general description of the dead is followed by another one of their burial ground and the effect of time and clime upon their hardened bodies. Then in three scenes the poet portrays the effect of the sight of the mighty dead upon the leading representatives of the great animal divisions, the eagle, the serpent, and the lion. The eagle, about to swoop down upon his prey, halts in midair, subdued by the peace and strength expressed in their faces. The great desert serpent, writhing its coils in the hot sun, slowly glides towards the army of his ancient enemy—man—and is ready to strike with his venomous fangs, but terrified he recoils and passes on hissing. In the moonlit night the prowling lion comes and with risen mane and tail prepares to spring, but he too pauses and retraces his steps.

The second part is the scene in which the poet resurrects the dead army. The time chosen is the moment when a storm breaks out in the wide expanse of the sand. Then the dead awaken and roar along with the storm their battle cry, their wilfulness, their passion for freedom, their protest against the decree of God. Thus:

We are the mighty!
The last generation of slaves and first generation of freemen.
Alone our hand in its strength
Tore from the pride of our shoulders the yoke of bondage.

And who is Lord of us?
Even now, though the God of vengeance has shut the desert upon us,
A song of strength and revolt has reached us, and we rise.
To arms! to arms! Form ranks! Forward!

The third part is the conclusion. The storm has passed, stillness reigns again, and quietly lie the dead in their corner, hidden from the eyes of men, only legend telling of their existence.

There are two elements which make this poem one of the best creations of Bialik; the first is the deep pathos expressed in the tragic frustration of the great desire and the stunting of the mighty will of the dead, which the poet makes us feel vividly as if the tragedy were our own. In fact, the *Meté Midbar* also has some allegoric function. At one time, the poet thought that his generation represented the last of the "dead of the wilderness" and that a new generation ready for redemption had already grown up and he expressed these ideas in his earlier poem *Meté Midbar ha-Aharonim*, but time changed his belief and in the later poem he merely expressed his admiration for a strong

will and indomitable courage even if the goal is not always attained. The second significant element in the poem is the remarkable description of nature. For the first time the animal world comes within Bialik's ken. Coming as they did from a man who has never seen a desert nor a lion in the wilds, nor possibly even an eagle in flight, nor the great serpents in their desert habitat, the descriptions are astounding and can only be attributed to his exceptionally sharp poetic eye, thus he writes:

Sometimes when mid-day is hot and the desert swoons under the
sunlight,
Slides from its fastness a serpent, vast as the beam of a weaver
Issues to warm on the sand the glistening rings of his body.
Now he shrinks on himself, coils himself more moveless and breathless,
Languid with joy in the warmth and bathing in light as in waters;
Now he wakes and uncoils and stretches his length in the sunlight,
Opens the width of his jaws and his scales are like network of lightning,
Spangled and knitted in splendor, a lonely delight in the desert.⁸⁴

The *Megillat ha-Esh* (The Scroll of Fire) is the second historical narrative poem. It is written in blank verse and is based on some legends clustering around the destruction of the Temple. Its purpose is apparently to express in a symbolic and poetic way the conflict of forces in Jewish history during the long exile. But the plan is not carried out consistently nor is there unity in the development of the poem. There seems to be, on the whole, two different parts, each carrying its own idea, the first devoted to the tragedy of the people as a whole, and the second to that of the individual. The only relation between the two is the identity of the hero whose pathetic fate is sung of in both parts.

The first part opens with a prologue telling of the mourning in heaven at the destruction of the Temple and the deep inexpressible grief of God Himself at the tragedy. The Temple lay in ashes and the ruins were smouldering but amidst the stillness shone a flicker of the holy fire of the Altar. This flicker an angel, at the command of God, scooped up and entrusted to the morning star as a custodian. The star placed it in a deserted island and guarded it from above. This is followed by the legend about two hundred young men and two hundred maidens, scions of the noble families of Jerusalem who were taken captives and left by the enemy on a desolate island. They

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 309, 312, 316.

were divided into two camps separated by a dark river, the river of perdition. Despair reigned in the camp of the young men; two of them, however, distinguished themselves above the rest. One was of dark visage, the cloud of wrath resting upon his brow and his eyes bent downward "as if searching for the loss of his soul." The other, a clear-eyed, golden-haired youth gazed heavenward "as if searching the star of his life." The former bore the message of hate and destruction, the latter that of hope and comfort. Each one sang a song expressing his message, and when the song laden with animosity swept the camp, a terrifying sight was seen on the other side of the river. The two hundred maidens in somnambulistic state and in single file slowly approached the steep bank of the river and like a flock of white birds glided into the stream. The young men threw themselves into the dark waters to save them, but a mighty wave rose and swallowed them all except the clear-eyed youth. Thus ends the first part.

The second part is the story of that youth who sees on the opposite cliff a pretty maiden over whose head glimmers the morning star. He tells her of his tragic life. His father died in the war of liberation, his mother was taken captive. He was lost in the world but longed for love, and it seemed to him that he always saw the image of the maiden before him. But then the conflict began; instructed by a Nazarite, he was taught to subdue his passions, stifle his emotions in honor of God who called him to a holy life. Too strong, though, was the body; he fell and stumbled on his way, and thus the conflict raged on. He then tells the story to the silent maiden and prays for love. Suddenly the maiden disappears from the cliff, but her image is reflected in the waters. Guided by that image, he goes in search of the holy fire; he grasps it and raises the torch of salvation aloft. At the moment the image of the maiden appears from the river and the youth plunges in its dark waters. He was, though, not destined to be lost, for the waters carry him to a far land—the land of exile in which he wanders since. He carries three fires in his heart—divine, satanic, and love. The first two symbolize hope and sorrow and are expressed by words of kindness and encouragement with which he comforts his brethren, and by his rage at their suffering which breaks forth frequently in a cry of pain.

What does it all mean? It is really difficult to piece together the various ideas expressed through symbols into one harmonious thought. There is no doubt that in the second part the poet represents the con-

flicting forces within his soul, that of sorrow at the fate of his people and that of comfort, and also bewails his own life which was passed in restraint and in lack of cheer and love. In general, it seems that the poet wanted to advance his views that the underlying forces of Jewish history during exile are revolt against fate and hope. Revolt, when carried to excess leads only to destruction, and this is symbolized by the drowning of the youths and maidens, with the exception of the hopeful one. The hero seems to be a compromise; he combines comfort and hope with the feeling of pain and revolt. Tragedy is, of course, the result, but it is a necessary one, for its pathos feeds the very spring of life of the people of Israel. There is a lack of harmony in the poem, and much irrelevant matter but some of its component parts possess beauty and poetic vigor. On the whole, the reader, though bewildered, derives much exaltation from this poem.

Bialik wrote also a number of delightful songs called *mi-Shiré 'Am* (Folk Songs) which express the folk spirit; the theme is mainly marriage or rather the desire of the Jewish girl for her appointed fiancé. With hardly any other nation did the institution of marriage play such an important role as with the Jews. Marriage for the woman was the mission of her life; without it, life lost its very *raison d'être*, and even the man was considered only half a being (*Plag gufa*) when unmarried (Vol. II, Sec. 110). Small wonder then that from early maidenhood the thoughts of the girl were centered upon the *Hatan*, the fiancé. Unmarried daughters were a disgrace to the family and next to the problem of *Parnasah*, the head of the family pondered upon the problem of finding a husband for the grown-up daughter. This desire for love on the part of the daughters and the anxiety of the fathers were expressed in numerous folk songs in Yiddish and were sung by working girls in the shops or by itinerant minstrels at weddings. Bialik gave expression to these emotions in this group of songs. They bear the earmark of popular chants, a light and swinging rhythm, and are, here and there, tinged with pathos.

From all that has been said it becomes clear that the title "national poet" so frequently bestowed upon Bialik really belongs to him in the widest sense, for if there was ever a poet in modern times whose songs expressed the manifold of the Jewish national spirit, it was he. It seems to the writer that the poetry of the late "national poet" marks the close of a period of poetic activity in Israel which began with the Psalmists and ended with him. There will undoubtedly rise masters

among the Jews whose lyre will emit sweet tones, but in the words of our own Bialik, "one string will remain silent," the one in which the innermost spirit of Israel which animated the people for generations, expresses itself.

29. *SAUL TSCHERNICHOWSKI*

The fame of Bialik and the laurels with which he was crowned by the critics dimmed for a time the glory of all other poets who strove for a place in the sun, all but one, who after many tribulations, succeeded in overcoming prejudices in acquiring a prominent place beside the national poet. That man is Saul Tschernichowski (b. 1873). His success was due not to the similarity of his poetry to that of Bialik, but on the contrary, to the differences. In fact, the spirit prevailing in the songs and poems of Tschernichowski is diametrically opposed to that of Bialik, and yet to a degree, completes it. While the latter primarily gave expression to the tragedies and hopes of Jewish life of the age, and only in a small degree voiced the reaction of man to the world and life and its beauty, the former sings mainly of the feelings and thoughts of the man in the Jew, his relation to the universe and life, and in a lesser measure of the hopes, aspirations, and woes of the Jew. However, it is not a matter of quantity, but of quality. Tschernichowski has a new quality hitherto unknown in the entire modern Hebrew poetry. Almost all preceding poets sang of nature, life, and love, some from a sense of duty and others from real feeling, but none exhibited such naturalness, simplicity, and pure human rapture in the expression of their emotions as this poet. He represents in his poetry the embodiment of the secular tendency in the national movement which emphasized the striving to be like all other nations, and the emancipation from the life of the ghetto, and occasionally even from Jewish tradition. Tschernichowski is free from the bonds and ties of the past, indeed at times his freedom reaches an extreme degree, approaching paganism with which he displays great sympathy in many of his poems. Yet he is never conscious of this freedom and emancipation for the poet needed no liberation as he was never steeped in ghetto life and its views. Nor does this freedom imply a lack of Jewishness and love for his people, its history, or devotion to the national ideal. All these traits, especially the latter, find strong expression in his poems, and the number of his national songs exceeds that of Bialik. But his Jewishness is tinged with a peculiar flavor,

different from that of other poets, for it is permeated with the spirit of humanism. On the whole, Tschernichowski bears his Judaism lightly and finds no conflict between it and the world and life at large despite his decided inclination to paganism. Not that he really succeeded in synthesizing the two, but rather that both, the man and the Jew, dwell in harmony in his soul and in two separate compartments. It is on this account that the productions of this singer complement those of Bialik and give to the Hebrew poetry of the age a remarkable completeness and wholeness.

Much of this typical, and to an extent, dual character of Tschernichowski's poetry is explained by his life and education. Unlike most of the Hebrew writers and poets, who were born and bred in small towns or in the larger cities in the Pale of Settlement in Russia and grew up in an urban environment, which was saturated with piety and rigorous religious observances, far from nature, Tschernichowski was born in the village of Michailowka in the Crimea. The poet was the third generation of Jewish villagers in the Crimea, so that village life was a tradition in his family. His parents were observant Jews but were far from possessing rigorous piety. Young Saul was therefore raised up to the seventh year of his life in an atmosphere which was full of joy and play and in close proximity with nature and the animal world. Friendly relations existed then between the Jews and the peasants of the village and the child mingled freely with the Gentile urchins. Together with them he roamed the wide steppes in search of flowers and birds' nests and participated in all their plays and pranks. He probably knew some Yiddish but Russian was his native tongue and a general rudimentary education preceded his Hebrew one. His childhood memories were thus much different from those of most Hebrew poets. They contained no dark skies and crooked dirty streets, nor the yoke of the *Heder* and the blows of the irate teacher, but as he says in one of his poems, "golden fields, clear skies, and days of childhood full of charm and bright colors." These days left an indelible impression on his soul and greatly influenced his poetry which bears a cheerful character.

At the age of seven a change came into his life. He was then introduced to the study of Hebrew under the direction of an able teacher. It is due to this teacher that Saul Tschernichowski became a Hebrew poet, for he implanted in him a strong love for the language and for the Jewish people. His Jewish education was neither extensive nor

deep and included but a few pages of the Talmud, but it enabled young Saul to acquire a mastery of the Bible, some Agada, and a devotion to the Hebrew language. Curiously enough, this village youngster who lived in a non-Jewish atmosphere and to whom the Russian tongue came more naturally than the Hebrew, made his first literary attempts in the latter language rather than in the former. While a mere youth of twelve he composed a long Biblical poem by the name of *Uriah ha-Hitti*, dealing with the story of David, Bat-Sheba, and Uriah. This poem was followed by many more immature attempts until he finally found his way to Hebrew poetry.

At the age of fifteen, after completing the general elementary school in the village, the future poet came to Odessa and entered a commercial high school from which he graduated three years later with the highest distinction. He was not, however, inclined to enter a commercial career but preferred the study of natural sciences and medicine, and began to prepare himself for the university examinations in which, however, he was unsuccessful and he left Russia in the year 1899 and entered the University at Heidelberg.

His stay in Odessa, a center of Hebrew culture at the time, both developed his poetic genius and deepened his Jewishness. He came in contact with many famous writers and leaders of the *Hobebé Zion* movement, became permeated with the national ideal and for a time was active in the movement. Great influence was exerted on him by the young publicist, Joseph Klausner, who encouraged him in his poetic productivity and made him swear never to write poems in any other language but Hebrew. He also acted as Tschernichowski's literary agent and saw to it that his first poems should see the light in some out of the way Hebrew Journals and Annuals, for the standard publications were wary of his early efforts. Their pure human character, their erotic tinge, and their at times non-Jewish tone deterred the conservative editors. It was only after his first book of poems named *Hesyonot u-Manginot* (Visions and Songs) was published in 1899, also through the mediacy of Klausner, that his poems found favor with the editors and were sought after. This attitude, however, did not discourage the poet and he continued to indite his poems and songs feverishly, many of his best productions being written during his Odessa period.

His interest in Zionism and his devotion to Hebrew poetry did not prevent him, though, from leading a merry life, most unlike the one

usually led by Hebrew bards. His fine physique, vivacity, cheerfulness, and social grace made him a favorite in society, both Jewish and non-Jewish. He was very successful in his ways with women and was continually entangled in love affairs, of which that with a Greek girl, Miriam, was the most serious. These affairs served the poet as incentives for his numerous love poems which paradoxically enough were all written in Hebrew, a language totally unknown to the fair maidens who successively captured the young bard's heart.

In Heidelberg, Tschernichowski stayed for four years and studied natural sciences and medicine and then continued his studies in Lausanne, Switzerland, for three more years. His stay in these beautiful cities situated in the midst of a magnificent natural environment stimulated his love of nature, and together with the gay student life full of amorous episodes, served as an incentive to creative work. Many of his nature and love poems were written during these years.

In 1907 he returned to Russia and was engaged by a provincial health department as visiting physician in the villages. In this work he spent the years until the War when he was drafted as a military physician. After the War he settled in Berlin whence he emigrated in 1930 to Palestine. During all these vicissitudes, even during the years of traveling through Russian villages when he passed months without meeting even a single Jew, Tschernichowski did not forsake his Muse, and from time to time wrote poems and stories in Hebrew. It was, it seems, ordained for him that during a great part of his life, the two worlds, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, should strive in him for mastery, and quite frequently he fell under the influence of the latter, but never forsook the former.

The line of demarcation between Tschernichowski and the other Hebrew poets, contemporaries or predecessors, is his deep sense of unity with nature from which follows also his attitude towards life and his worship of beauty as its aim and goal. To him nature is not an object to be admired on certain occasions but something to be lived with all the time, every moment of man's life, for man is an inseparable part of the great world and only his culture separates him from his source. He is, therefore, striving consciously to reunite himself once more with the original fountain of life and be at one with the other members of the great family. In one of his nature poems, *Siah Kedumim* (The Ancient Speech), he tells us of the eloquence of the brook and the forest, how every little wavelet murmurs to him its

secrets, how the branches, roots, and shoots of the forest sing to him their endless song of life, and he concludes with the following stanza:

And in the vibrant life which flowered around me
I felt and understood the speech,
The simple story.
The humble speech ascending, did awaken
Remembrance, and at last I knew the sound,
My little brothers whom I had forsaken
Long years ago when God had from the ground
Removed me with the strong, and left the others
Modest and faint and sadly strewn around,
Until 'twas hard to see that we were brothers.
And the forest murmured softly—murmured softly.⁸⁵

This conception of nature is not in accord with the Jewish view which raises man above nature and the poet is quite conscious of it, and in another of his poems he characterizes himself as a strange plant in the garden of his people, one who differs from them in their views of God and life. Unlike them, he does not look to his God in heaven, but listens to His voice "in the infinite expanse, in the whisper of the grass of the fields, in the chirping of birds, in the rumbling thunder, and in the noisy breakers of the sea."⁸⁶ He strives "to share the life of the hyssop in the wall, the drop of water in the stream, and absorb the beauty of color, though it is ephemeral and illusive as the clouds."⁸⁷ This thought of God on earth, God in every manifestation of the universe and especially in its life is reiterated by our poet numerous times. It has a slight resemblance to expressions in Hassidic literature but with an entirely different connotation. It is more pagan than Jewish. It is not the revelation of the divine power hidden in nature with which the poet is concerned, but the divinity of nature itself and still more of the power expressed in inanimate nature and that of ever-welling, ever-changing life of the animate. Of Tschernichowski it can be said that he is life-intoxicated. He strives to it with every drop of his blood. In an exquisite nature poem, *Nocturno*, which pictures the beauties of nature at night, he turns to the mountains, the sun and the moon, which though themselves inanimate, are the cause of life's forces, and asks them to endow him with strength, to enable him to enjoy the storm of passion and even to experience in full the

⁸⁵ Collected Poems, Vol. I, pp. 163, 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

sorrow there is in the world, for both joy and sorrow are parts of life. And when the storm of life is quieted, the poet continues, all he asks for is strength to resign himself calmly to the inevitable and to become metamorphosed as a single strand in the great web of eternal forces.

This thirst for life with full activity of all human powers and full play of its emotions impressed itself very deeply on the character of his poetry. There are very few poets, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to whom life is the summum bonum as it is to Tschernichowski. He is, of course, aware of its tribulations, of its sorrows, and pain, but he disregards them for he finds ample compensation in the contemplation of beauty in nature, in the legitimate satisfaction of desires, though it be momentary, and above all, in the joy of conquest of obstacles. In fact, struggle and ultimate conquest is, according to the poet, the very essence of life. In a letter to Dr. Klausner, Tschernichowski writes as follows: "Life itself, as it is very often revealed to us in reality, is ugly, but the content and essence of life is glorious, veritable poetry, nay, even a song of songs. It is the song of conquest of order over chaos, of being over non-being, of life over death.—Eternity, infinity is death; becoming, change, is life.—The conquest is momentary, but conquest nevertheless. The life of every one living," he continues, "is a song and when one becomes conscious of that song he is a poet. All poets should by right be poets of conquest, but the ugliness of life, poverty, oppression, and evil make many of them poets of defeat. I am a poet of conquest, but as a Jew it is my destiny to be a poet of defeat. And against this fate I struggle, and even as a Jew I am the bearer of the song of conquest. But when I really feel defeated, I am silent, for the conquered have no songs but dirges."*

This remarkable document which contains a philosophy helps us to understand the character both of the poet and his productions. We see the source of his love of strength, of conquering might, of the joy of overcoming obstacles, and simultaneously of faith and optimism, all of which are found in the spirit prevailing in his poems. On the whole, there is no tragedy in them, no tears, but rather hope and joy in nature and life, and cheerfulness. And when defeat in the form of suffering of his people stares him in the face, he does not accept it with resignation and weep over it, but meets it with bursts of anger and cries for revenge. To all these traits must be added the deep sense

* This letter is quoted in full by Klausner in his article on Tschernichowski in *ha-Shiloah*, Vol. XXIV, p. 375. It was written in explanation of his silence during the years 1903-1905, following the Kishenew pogrom.

of beauty, a direct result of his view of nature and life with which the poet is saturated. Beauty is the highest aim and goal of life. He knows the value of strength and also that of knowledge, but higher than both is that of beauty. He expressed this thought in two of his poems. The first entitled *Shloshah Ketarim* (Three Crowns) in which he utilizes a Talmudic legend about Rabbi Yoḥanan and Simon ben Lakish, two Palestinian scholars of the third century C.E., extolling the beauty and learning of the former and the strength of the latter. He concludes with the following verses:

In all the world, three precious crowns there be.
Each crown with its own light for men to see,
Of strength, of Torah, and of beauty are the three.
Our praise to strength!
To Torah's crown, no less.
At beauty's worth who shall attempt a guess?⁸⁸

In the second called *Shalosh Amitiot* (Three Truths), he sings of the truth of the individual—that of might; the truth of society—that of Torah and law, in both of which there are flaws and evil; but above these two there is the truth of beauty, pure and noble.⁸⁹ Small wonder, then, that this poet of life, strength, and beauty found in love a most suitable vehicle for the expression of his spirit and Muse. Love to him is a fundamental quality of life. He sees in human love the manifestation of an elemental force in nature and life which is only enhanced by the beauty of the object beloved. It is this view which accounts for his numerous love poems.

All these traits in his personality called forth in Tschernichowski a yearning for paganism. It is in that bygone world where nature worship prevailed, beauty was glorified, freedom of desire sanctioned and love held sway that he finds the counterpart to his own soul. He therefore sings to Ashtoret and to Bel, symbolizing the sun and the moon, the two great sources of life and growth. He bewails the death of Tamuz (Mot ha-Tamuz)—the Semitic equivalent of Adonis or Pan—which symbolizes to him the death of paganism and writes a cycle of sonnets which he entitles *Sonetos 'Akum* (Sonnets of Paganism). Apparently, the Greek element is dominant in the poet's paganism, but in reality it is not so; he often identifies it with the early Hebrew variety and hence his frequent glorification of the very early period in

⁸⁸ Ibid., Vol. III, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

Jewish history. Thus, in his poem, *le-Nokah Pesel Apollo* (Before the Statue of Apollo), after he sings of Apollo as the god of life and joy, he tells of the gap between the religion of his ancestors and the worship of the Greek god and avers that he, the poet, is the first to cross it for he longs for life. However, he then turns around and tells us that he uses Apollo only as a symbol for the good and noble in the world, for life, strength, and beauty, and that in reality he is the God of ancient Israel, who later was metamorphized into the God of law and he exclaims:

The mighty God that conquered Canaan with a whirlwind,
How have they bound him up
With straps of phylacteries!⁴⁰

Strange words for a Hebrew poet, unheard of before, and they called forth many protests. Yet Tschernichowski's opposition to traditional Judaism is much milder than the rebellion against the law and its yoke expressed by Berdichewski and Brenner. True, he too, as we will see, protests against the law which weakened the people, but there is no malice in it. On the contrary, the poetic side of religious practice appealed to him greatly and he was the first poet to compose beautiful idylls of Jewish life in which it is glorified. On the whole, his Jewishness is of the secular type, and his nationalism is in great evidence in his poetry. Not only did he write many Zionist poems, but also numerous historical poems, several in which Jewish suffering is the motive, and as said, a number of long descriptive and narrative poems of Jewish life which he calls idylls. The last are especially distinguished by their beauty and art. In his historical poems, true to his nature, he selects episodes which demonstrate the strength and heroism of the Jews. Even in his poems of Jewish suffering, there is no wailing, no tears, only anger and wrath, not against his unfortunate people but against their oppressors, mingled with cries for revenge and curses against the cruel tormentors of Israel. Life, nature, love, beauty, striving for strength, love for his people, and faith in its future—these are then the outstanding characteristics of Tschernichowski's poetry, and they found an echo in the hearts of a rising generation.

From the general characterization of Tschernichowski's poetry, we pass to a somewhat more detailed survey of its phases. Viewing nature as he does, as the all-embracing source of being of which man is a part,

⁴⁰ Vol. I, p. 205.

he glorified it in numerous poems. His descriptions of its beauties are not as scintillating as those of Bialik but they are more detailed and are not limited to one or two phases but are inclusive. He sings of all times and of all seasons, of mountains and forests, of the sea in storm and in moments of calm. He loves, like most Jewish poets, the light, but knows also the beauties of the night, the pale light of the moon, its reflection in the dark waters of the lake and the mysteries of the grotesque shadows. A fundamental trait of Tschernichowski's nature poetry is its naturalness. He is not an outsider who comes with pen in hand to describe the beauty of nature, but he sings as one who is at home in all its nooks and corners, for as he expresses it in one of his first poems, "Blessed are the insignificant things as much as the important ones." As a man of the wide steppes of southern Russia, he loves the expanse, the flowers that cover its wide bosom, the blue sky above; but as a wanderer in many lands, he is also enchanted by the mysteries of the deep forest every corner of which is familiar to him. Nor are the rising peaks of the mountains strangers to him, for he explored every bend and followed the trails to the everlasting snow.

However, the quality that distinguishes the nature poetry of the bard is not so much the description of the beauty of the world as the revelation of the power of life which courses through all its veins and parts. Tschernichowski is a veritable hylozoist. To him nature is not dead but a living organism, throbbing with life, growth, and silent movement. To him, nature, both animate and inanimate, is one incessant song, a wonderful song which he, whose soul is attuned, not only hears but responds to. This song, though heard also in the inanimate, is especially vibrant in the animate, in the world of plants and living beings. And in one of his poems, *Agadat ha-Abib* (The Legend of the Spring), our poet opens our ear to that song, describing the rhythm of the awakening life in the spring as a result of the warming rays of the sun. In a few beautiful verses he expresses the very soul and essence of that great song of nature.

Truly the deeds of the sun are beyond compare.
 Incline your ear and I'll tell of the giant's glare
 For his stare is Life, and Life and Love are one.
 And death's domain is where there is no sun.
 In all the world there is no spot nor place
 Concealed from his bright rays of love and grace.⁴¹

⁴¹ Vol. I, p. 112.

It is the unity of life, nature and love which runs like a red thread through almost all of Tschernichowski's nature poems. He glorifies and sings odes to the power of life which is manifested in the growth of plants, in the incessant movement of insects, the flight of birds, and the roaming of animals. At times he symbolizes that power by the name of pagan deities as in his song, *la-Ashtoret u-la-Bel* (Ashtarta and Bel)—the moon and the sun—both powers of life and growth, where, after describing the effects of the sun upon the course of life, he concludes with a call to man:

And thy soul shall absorb this mystery
Full of secrets, full of glory,
It is the law of life and its statute,
Rise and ascend, be strong and love!⁴²

Since the sun is the life giving power there is small wonder that it occupies a prominent part in his nature poems. Almost every poem of his contains a stanza or two about the sun and its life-giving light. With glee he sings:

My sun is up! See how it spreads its light
In vale, in brook and thicket, and the night
Blossoms and flowers and spirals to the height.
The river glows—rejoices at the sight.
Hasten, my brother, towards its radiance bright
With wind-tossed hair and bare feet gleaming white.⁴³

He even composed a whole cycle of sonnets to the sun wherein he expresses his thirst for its light and glorifies it and, introducing a personal note, he tells us of his youth when as a child roaming the light-drenched steppes he absorbed it in his very soul. It is this light which kept his spirit up even in the tumult and the din-laden atmosphere of the city. Even as a surgeon with knife in hand, he absorbed the last glimmering light reflected in the eye of the dying patient.⁴⁴ He thus does not tire of telling us of his thirst for light and life.

From his identification of man with nature, from his glorification of the power of love and light manifested in it, there follows not only the personification of nature but also its integration in the life of the poet. Very few singers introduced the personal element into their nature songs to such a degree as Tschernichowski. The contemplation of

⁴² Ibid., p. 320.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 353.

⁴⁴ Vol. II, p. 39.

nature reminds him frequently of episodes in his own life or suggests solutions to problems in that of his people or in the destiny of man. In his *Agadot ha-Abib*, the awakening rhythm of life in the spring calls forth the image of his beloved who appears to him as a vision of beauty surrounded by a halo of light. In another poem entitled *Mitok Ab ha-Anan* (From the Thickness of the Clouds), after describing the outbreak of a storm over mountains, rivers, and forest accompanied by rumbling of thunder and flashing of lightning, he turns to sing of human strength. Man, says he, should derive his strength from the storm, rocks, and forests, and just as these withstand struggle and brute force he likewise should endure. Even if the horizon is darkened he should kindle his own light, and free from the burden of ages, proceed forward.⁴⁵ In still another poem, *Ben Harim* (Amidst Mountains), after describing the mountains and a brewing storm he concludes:

Rock of my salvation! Thunder upon this heap of Death;
And if you have a storm concealed, that with its breath
Could rouse a people meek beneath its yoke—
Almighty God, call to that storm!⁴⁶

At times descriptions of nature call forth historical episodes. Thus in one of the fine passages incorporated in his Jewish idylls (see below) in which the Crimean steppe is described in its sombre beauty his vision calls forth the many wandering nations who roamed over this wide expanse in the dim days of history—Scythians, Polovzi, and even the Khazars. Contemplation of the beauty and strength of the waves of the sea in their rush for freedom conjures forth a vision in *le-Noqah ha-Yam* (In the Presence of the Sea) of a hero who with a force like that of the waves sought to break the bonds of his people, but like them, was defeated, and he sings the epic of *Bar Kokba*.

The motive of the sea, the symbol of restlessness and rebellion, appealed strongly to Tschernichowski who in his youth and later in Odessa lived near it, and we therefore have a number of poems of the sea, the best of which is *ha-Krit* (The Breakers), where the incessant attempt of the breakers to conquer the shore and their attacks upon the rocks are masterfully described and sympathy is expressed for the futility of their efforts. The note of pathos for wasted strength is heard in the concluding stanza depicting the sea at rest.

⁴⁵ Vol. I, p. 160.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 284.

But afar off a changing shape appears,
 Some form obscure—dissolving—failing
 Dismal and low—a whispered voice of tears
 So like a threnody of human wailing.⁴⁷

Thus the poet reveals to us nature in its entirety, in its various moods and phases, and opens its portals so that we may glimpse its mysteries and its very soul.

The love poems of Tschernichowski exhibit the same characteristics as his nature poems, namely naturalness and simplicity. There is no attempt on his part at artificiality. He sings of love because it is a part of his very being. He does not say with Bialik, "They say there is love in the world. What is love?" On the contrary, his life in his youth was filled with a series of successive love affairs. It is because of this quality of naturalness that his love poems are, on the whole, very pure and display little of the erotic. In most of his poems, love is represented as a noble emotion, and not as a stormy passion. It is, as he expresses himself, a longing of one soul for another, for

The soul of man must surely know
 Its counterpart where e'er it be,
 And feel a clinging nearness, though
 Between them lies the widest sea.⁴⁸

He also introduces the nature motive in his love poems. One reminds him of the other, and the charms of the beloved are frequently described in terms of nature. Her eyes radiate light and warmth, and her smile brings him the breath of spring even when the howling of the wind is heard and the cold of winter still reigns supreme.

There are a number of poems which describe disappointment in love, but there is no bitterness in them, no tragic note, but on the contrary, a feeling of gratefulness for the happy moments spent together and for the beauty enjoyed.

Tschernichowski's sense of beauty is strong and his description of the charms of his beloved is therefore extensive, revealing the exquisiteness of the various parts of the body, but like all Jewish poets, emphasis is laid by him on the eyes. It is these with their changing colors, their lights and depths which enchant him the most.

In his later love poems, especially in the cycle called *Shirim le-Ilul*, there is a more passionate tone, and love is spoken of at times as a

⁴⁷ Vol. II, p. 76.

⁴⁸ Vol. I, p. 125.

storm, as an intoxication of desire, but on the whole, his love poems afford us aesthetic pleasure and inspire us with a sense of a noble and pure human feeling.

The same characteristics displayed in the poems hitherto considered are also in evidence in his lyric poems. The cry for life, the belief in the power of poetry and beauty, the longing for strength and expression of the will to act, these are the principal motives of his lyric songs. The sorrow of the world, the tragedy and pathos of life find no place in his poems. On the other hand, there is some attention paid to the social problems, to the suffering of the masses, and to visions of social ideals. The first group of motives, however, predominate.

He begins his lyrics with an ode to poetry called *Lo-Tomut Bat ha-Shir* (Thou Wilt Not Die, Daughter of Poesy), in which he assures the Muse that it will live forever in spite of the narrowing of its domain by man's encroachment upon nature and his destruction of its beauty. It will find its place even in the midst of the turmoil of industry, and will break forth amidst the wheels of the machines and the hiss of the furnace. As long as life pulsates in the heart of man and love and faith still have a place there, it will hold sway. The power of poetic emotion in the life of man is also glorified in a number of other songs, the best among which are *Kol Dikfin* (Whoever Is Hungry; the title is taken from the Passover Haggadah) and the cycle of sonnets, *Al ha-Dam* (About Blood). In the first, the poet speaks to a weary humanity, robbed of its treasures and hungry for the word of God. He assures it of his ability to enrich its soul by revealing the wonders of the world and the glory of human desire, and furthermore, avows that he can revitalize life, impoverished by lack of faith and despair, with his song. In the cycle the same motive is prominent, but on a larger scale. The fifteen sonnets which it comprises tell of humanity's search for light and truth, and its disappointment in its quest. It was misled by false prophets and priests whose teachings only led to more misery and bloodshed. Even the social reformers, those who preach justice and liberty, will be cursed, for chains and prison await the noble spirits who would not submit to their rule. He concludes in the last sonnet that only the devotees of beauty and the followers of the Muse can redeem man and lead him to the road of progress. Several of these sonnets were written under the influence of the revolutionary régime in Russia. Much stress is also laid on the motive of struggle for power and action which are glorified in a number of lyrics. In one he

tells us how he fortifies his waning strength by the contemplation of nature where struggle goes on endlessly, especially between the breakers of the sea and the rocks. From the latter he learns to bear adversity with pride and hope, for though the waves storm at their feet their heads rise to the heights. The same idea is expressed in the poem, *Ben Kibrot Dor Neḳar* (Among the Graves of a Strange People) where, while wandering among the ruins of Mediaeval castles around Heidelberg and observing the strength embodied in the old fortifications, he exclaims:

I yearned that for once I might rouse me from sleeping
To dance in life's surge with a thunderous leaping.
To know once for all if I came into being
A bar of strong iron for building and freeing.
For this did I long—that my thoughts and my dreaming
Transformed into labor would set my eyes gleaming,
The rise and the fall of my hammer would be
Like the rise of my breast—like a boat on the sea.⁴⁹

The same note of idealization of strength is heard in *Shiré ha-Adam* (The Songs of Man), in which he speaks of three types of songs: the song of the primitive tiller of the soil—the song of freedom; the song of civilized man—which unites the elements of faith and humility, the longing for happiness, and the sorrow of suffering; and the song of strength—the song of the one who masters and rules the world, nobler than both.

The poet, however, is neither a pure individualist nor an admirer of brute strength. He, as was said, is not insensitive to the social unrest and to the social ideas of the time. These motives are expressed in three lyrics: *me-Hezyonot ha-Nabi* (The Visions of the Prophet); *Shir Mizmor li-Bené Tubal Kayin* (A Song of the Children of Tubal Cain); and *me-Hezyonot Nebi ha-Sheḳer* (The Visions of the False Prophet). The first, in imitation of Ezekiel, XXXVI, is a prophecy unto the proud mountains who look down upon the lowly valleys that in the end there will come the destruction of the mountains and the fructification of the valleys. The allegoric meaning is quite evident and needs no interpretation. In the second, the poet sings of four resounding sounds: the first heard in the primaeval forests of ancient times, the sound of the hunter sharpening his sword of flint—the sound of the early conqueror of the world; the second, the striking of the hammer

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 201.

in the fields—the craftsman forging his spade and plow for the conquest of the soil; the third, the sound in the smithy—the smith forging chains for the exploited workers; and the fourth, the sound of the hum of the wheels in the factory—the young worker creating, amidst the din of machines, a new Torah, a new truth. The third poem is again a prophecy, this time of the so-called false prophet—but to Tschernichowski the true one—telling of the impending judgment of humanity by God for its sins. In Apocalyptic manner he sees a vision of God coming to cleanse the world by three streams. The first, that of hate, will flood nations and the subjected and downtrodden will rise against their oppressors; this will be followed by the stream of freedom when the chain of servitude will be broken and nations will emerge in the light of liberty; and finally there will rise a third stream, unnamed as yet, which will bring harmony among nations. This is our poet's ideal of the future.

As was said above, there is little of the tragedy of life in his lyric poems with one exception. This exception is *Shoshanat Pelaiim* (Wonderful Rose). To each man, says the song, is given during life one wonderful flower; some find it in their youth, and some spend their days in search of it. Still others find to their dismay that their flower has already been plucked and their life remains empty. There is a touching note in this song for many do, indeed, find their life's quest gone beyond recovery. Some do find it, but too late to enjoy it, and only very few find it at the proper time.

We come now to an important phase of Tschernichowski's poetry, his national and Jewish songs. They are of the secular type and are imbued with a spirit of love and devotion to his people as well as that of rebellion and protest against their present state. He rails especially against the meekness of his brethren who accept their fate with resignation, without making any attempt to change it. Unlike Bialik, however, he does not chastise his unfortunate people, nor does he pour his wrath upon the sufferers, but gives vent, in historical poems, to his feelings in cries for revenge in which the great deeds of former heroes of Israel are glorified and a revival of their spirit is urged. His national poems also display, in a great measure, the general characteristics of his personality, his optimism and his striving for a normal life, in which the will expresses itself to the fullest capacity, and the physical powers of man are realized along with the spiritual.

His very first Zionist song, *Ani Ma'amin* (I Believe), displays that

spirit. It is a kind of credo of the poet. He tells his friend that he has not lost faith in man, that he believes in the freedom of spirit, in the genuineness of friendship, in the happy future of humanity when peace will reign among nations, and when his people will also arise to a new life, and concludes with the lines:

It will live, it will love, it will labor and do!
 Today's generation is made of strong stuff.
 No promise of Paradise spurs them anew,
 For airy Utopias are not enough.⁵⁰

This note of hope and buoyancy, in spite of the dark situation of the present, is also heard in another of his early Zionist poems entitled *Hayyim Hadashim* (New Life) in which the singer, using a poetic device, conveys to us his faith in the incipient national life in Palestine. Standing at the sea and listening to the murmur of the waves it seems to him that they bring him regards from Zion, for they carry a branch from Judea to the shores of Russia. Likewise, the wind, caressing the leaves of the trees, conveys greetings from that land and tells of the new life which had just begun there. Even the rising sun informs the poet of his visit to Zion and relates that a new dawn is breaking in the ancient land, driving away the age-old shadows by its rays of light. This hope for restoration, for revival, timid at first, grew with the spread of the national movement and with the poet's participation in it. It gathered momentum, and the singer's belief in the rehabilitation of his people and its land is expressed with more certainty and strength in his later life. In *Anhot Kinor* (The Sighs of the Harp), after telling of the mournful tones emitted by the harp of Israel, he concludes:

And perhaps at the sight of those who return
 The song of the crushed will be ended;
 An ode then of triumph and pride we will learn
 With cymbals and tambourines blended.
 Or else with a gasp—a last cry of dismay
 Our age-old lamenting will vanish for aye.⁵¹

There is still a "perhaps" in his hope of restoration, but with the rise of the Herzlian Zionist movement, his confidence increases and his tone grows firmer. In the *Shir Eres* (A Lullaby), the mother, while singing to her child of his fate as a Jew, also utters these words of encouragement:

⁵⁰ Collected Poems, Vol. I, p. 11.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 49.

Even though redemption falter
 Or approach with halting tread,
 Hope on! Bear the iron halter!
 Soon our sun will shine o'erhead.⁵²

In another poem written about the same time, he calls:

Towards Zion your banners, O strong ones of Judah.
 Our God, O my brothers, is fortress and all.
 If bulwarks be lacking, our bosoms are ready
 Our hearts linked together will serve as our wall.⁵³

Another poem, *mi-Shiré ha-Golim* (Songs of Exiles), in which the singer puts forth a series of questions to a refugee from Palestine and the answers picture the desolation and ruin of the land, ends with the following verses:

The mountainous caves for them that are strong,
 For avengers—the clefts of the hill.
 The heights of the field for the heroes who long
 To pour their heart's blood with 'a will,
 That the Valley of Sharon may greet with a song
 The day that our hopes will fulfill.⁵⁴

This buoyant hope in the future of the people, the call to the young Jew to be a pioneer, a builder and restorer of the ancient land is epitomized in one of his later national poems, *Omrin Yeshnah Erez* (They Say There Is a Land). There, after devoting a few stanzas to the glory of the land of hope, the poet tells of the meeting of a young Jew with the great Akiba and of the dialogue between them which runs as follows:

Peace to thee, Akiba!
 My teacher, peace to thee!
 Where are all the hallowed?
 Where the Maccabee?
 Answers thus Akiba
 Thus he answers me
 "All Israel is hallowed;
 You are the Macabee!"⁵⁵

To this group of national poems belongs also one of his early songs, *Kibutz Galuyot* (Gathering of Exiles), which presents a grand picture

⁵² Ibid., p. 80.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁵ Vol. III, pp. 14, 15.

of an assembly of Jews from all over the world before the Wailing Wall. They come from the four corners of the world, and each tells of his birthplace and the city he hails from. There is a swing to its verses and a tinge of grandeur to the scene.

Our poet knows the song of hope but he also knows the song of wrath; his rebellious spirit often breaks forth in his poems. In *Harbi* (My Sword), he gives vent to that spirit in a strong manner. In his wrath at the tormentors of his people he searches for a sword in order to avenge the age-long suffering of his brethren. He, the worshipper of strength and strong passion, persuades himself that he would know no mercy and give no quarter. But then the full tragedy of the Jew dawns upon him, his weakness and powerlessness, and pathetically he bewails his impotent rage which can be expressed only in curses and gnashing of teeth. This impotence arouses in him rage against his own people, and in one of his poems entitled *mi-Hezyonot Nebi ha-Sheker* (Visions of the False Prophets), he expresses that rage in the form of a prophecy, in which the false prophet chastises the true seers for their addiction to the spirit and to things divine. It is, says he, their preaching which weakened the people and made them subject to suffering. In the manner of Gordon and Berdechewski, he makes the men of the spirit, the scholars, partly responsible for the fate of the Jews. But he does not despair; he hopes for a revival of the ancient spirit of heroism. The same rebellion against weakness is expressed in a stronger manner in a poem written at the beginning of the World War, *Manginah* (The Melody). The poet speaks of a strange melody which he constantly hears within himself. It is the song of his own blood. The song hails from olden times, from the days of the rebellious generation of the desert, of the conquerors of Canaan, and of the Maccabean heroes. It is a song of strength and also of revolt against the spirit of the martyrs in Spain, in Poland, and other places, whose heroism was exhibited in passive resignation to fate. Nay, his blood sings of strife and struggle and of a return to ancient heroism.

This striving for strength, the desire for revenge and the adoration of heroism caused the poet to turn to the past and write a number of historical poems, where he either glorifies those moments when Jewish physical prowess manifested itself, or even creates episodes in which imaginary revenge found its realization. Hence his poems, *be-Lail Hanukkah* (The Night of Hanukkah), *ha'-Ahron li-Bené Kuraiza* (The Last of the Tribe of Kuraiza), *'Al Horbot Bet Shaan* (The

Ruins of Bet-Shaan); *Betarah* (On to Betar); *le-Noḳah ha-Yam* (At the Sea), and *Baruch mi-Magenza* (Baruch of Mayence). The first is a phantasy in which the poet sees before him the Maccabees and other heroes rising from their graves. They bewail the weakness of their descendants, the present-day Jews, their powerlessness and lack of will; they express their bitter disappointment and disappear in a storm. The second is a glorification of the deeds of the last member of the Jewish tribe in Arabia, the Sons of Kuraiza, who gallantly fought Mohammed but were overpowered by numbers. The last scion is offered his life by an Arab friend, but he spurns it contemptuously, being satisfied that the glory of his brethren will remain in song and story. In the third, we have a vision of the nightly prowling of the shade of Saul, the first Jewish king, over the ruins of Bet Shaan whither his body was carried by the Philistines. He broods over his defeat and searches for his sword in order to avenge himself on his enemies. The hero of the fourth and fifth is Bar Kokba, a favorite of the poet. In the former, Bar Kokba's flight, according to legend, from a Roman amphitheatre where he had fought and conquered a lion, to Betar in order to begin his revolution against Roman rule, is described. In the latter, he appears to the poet in a vision and pictures to him the glory of his heroism, while bewailing the ingratitude of the people who called him instead of *Bar Kokba*, the Son of the Star, Bar Koziba, Son of Lies. In all these poems, there is a vigor and strength which arouses the national pride and calls forth a will to great deeds on behalf of the people.

Baruch mi-Magenza is in a class by itself. It is one of the best historical narrative poems in the entire Hebrew literature. In it the tragedy of Jewish suffering through the ages is painted in darkest colors by the recital of the woeful tale of a single Jew, and simultaneously the anger and wrath of the poet at the tormentors of Israel is expressed in such strong terms that we are almost repelled by its cruelty. But there is more than pathos and wrath in it; there is also beauty. There are pages in which Baruch recounts the episodes of his family life which enchant us by their idyllic charm, and their beauty is enhanced by masterly descriptions of nature. The poem is based on fragments of a legend of the days of the Crusades, embellished by the rich imagination of Tschernichowski. Its content is as follows:

In an attack upon the Jews of Mayence during the first Crusade, the wife of Baruch was killed whereupon with his own hands he

killed his two daughters so that they might not be outraged by the mob. He himself, however, weakened and allowed himself to be dragged to the Church and baptized. He was placed in a monastery and there in the lonely cell was seized with remorse and resolved upon a terrible revenge. One night he took the oil lamp of the cell and poured its contents upon the bedding and lit the pile; a conflagration ensued which spread to the entire city. While it lasted, Baruch ran frenziedly through the streets to watch its destructive force and later came to the grave of his wife to tell her of his deed. The poem is in the form of a monologue, Baruch talking to his wife. It is logically divided into four parts. In the first he tells his wife of his conversion, how he, confused by the shouts of the blood-thirsty rabble, the chimes of the great Church bells, and blinded by the flash of naked swords and glistening blood-stained knives, consented. Then follows the tale of his remorse, the bitter pangs of sorrow aroused by the memories of his youth, especially the day of his *Bar Mizwah*, the day of his betrothal to the God of Israel. In the second part he tells his wife the awful secret of the slaying of his two daughters so that their children should not later join the enemies of their people and rejoice at the sight of Jews roasting in the fire. The gruesome tale is detailed and is replete with masterfully depicted scenes of their childhood and of episodes of fatherly love, all of which heighten the tragedy. In the third part, the wrath of the poet breaks forth in tremendous fury. Baruch pours forth a torrent of curses against the enemy which appal us by their venom and thirst for revenge. In the last part comes the story of the conflagration and his frenzied running through the streets, watching the tongues of the all-consuming fire. He calls it the glorious candle which he lit in honor of the dead. In this part there are passages which are touching by their beauty and noble feeling. Baruch reminds his wife of the nest of a swallow above the door of their house, and describes at length the day's work of the bird. He further pictures to her the sight he witnessed when flames seized the house and the mother bird attempted to save her young. He himself wanted to save them at the risk of his own life, but mercy froze in his heart at the memory of the cruel destruction of his own nest and those who dwelt in it. The exquisiteness and pathos of the scene are superb and enhance the poetic value of the poem.

Baruch mi-Magenza was published after the cruel pogrom of Kishi new in the spring of 1903, and while it was begun earlier, it was

undoubtedly completed and the contents retouched under the influence of that event. It is the poet's response to that pogrom and forms a proper complement to Bialik's *In the City of Slaughter*.

This form of revenge cruel in nature reflects only a momentary outburst of wrath. In reality, Tschernichowski, with all his admiration for strength, does not desire it. He craves a more noble form of revenge which he expresses in a later poem written after the Ukrainian massacres in the years 1918-1920 and entitled *Zot Tehi Nikmatenu* (This Will Be Our Revenge). Nay, says he, we are weak; we cannot and will not repay you in your own cruel way. Still, there is a form of revenge, for evil begets evil. Our blood that was shed will poison the souls of the tormentors and it will breed more cruelty, more immorality and a demoralization which will penetrate the hearts of the children and children's children until destruction will come upon the proud oppressors of Israel, for the cry of blood must be stilled even if ages elapse before it is silenced.

All these poems reflect and depict the pathos of Jewish life, the bitter strife and desperate struggle for existence, the suffering and the passion, but there is also another side to that life in which the peace of faith and of innocent belief reigns and joy is not unknown, and Tschernichowski was not insensible to the beauties of that phase of Jewish life. In fact, he is one of the few Hebrew poets who idealized the every day life and sang of its charms, especially in the long narrative poems which he called idylls. The idyllic peace which reigns in the Jewish home on Friday night, the sorrow and longing which fill the soul at the departure of the queen Sabbath, the joy and glee which sweep the entire congregation at the Feast of Rejoicing of the Law (Simḥat Torah) in which old and young participate, served him as motives for songs. In his *ba-Shishi ben 'Arbayyim* (Friday Eve), *Moxoe Shabbat* (The Departure of the Sabbath), and *Hakofot*, he portrays the delightful scenes with sympathy and love. His great distinction, however, lies in his narrative poems. With the exception of Gordon he is the only Hebrew poet up to his time who attempted to write that species of poetry which borders on the epic, but he far excels his predecessor. His narrative poems or idylls are veritable masterpieces, for they display a combination of poetic insight and a rare power of description to which is added a colorful portrayal of the beauty of nature. Of such idylls, there are five: *Lebibot Mebusholot* (The Baking of Cakes), *Brit Milah* (The Feast of Circumcision),

Kehom ha-Yom (In the Heat of the Day), *Ma'asé be-Mordecai we-Yoachim* (Story of Mordecai and Joachim), and *Hatunata Shel-Elkah* (The Wedding of Elkah). The scenes depicted in them are taken from the life of the Crimean Jews, especially the villagers, which was, on the whole, before the World War, happier, more secure, and more cheerful than that of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement. Their relations with the Gentiles were amicable and neighborly, for they shared many things in common, including supersition.

It is impossible to summarize the contents of these poems, for their value lies mainly in detailed description and exquisite miniature portraits. We can only remark that the best of these idylls are *Lebibot Mebusholot* and *Hatunata Shel-Elkah*. The theme of the first is a trivial one. Gittel, the widow of the Rabbi in one of the Crimean villages, rises one bright sunny morning and begins to bake cakes for her breakfast. The poet describes the making of the cakes with artistic and technical skill, and intertwines the story of her life and the life of her children which rise before her in memory. Especially luminous in the series of pictures is that of the grandchild, Resele, episodes of whose life are joined by the poet with each step in the process of the cake-baking. The tales end in tragedy; while the cakes are in the oven, the grandmother receives a letter from Resele informing her that she has been arrested for political activities, and this tragedy disrupts the idyllic world of the old woman. The second poem is the detailed story of the wedding of the daughter of a rich Crimean Jew. It contains six cantos each describing a part of the festivities which lasted, in good old Jewish fashion, for six days. The poem, as a whole, is a veritable mosaic of numerous events and colorful natural scenes which afford us aesthetic pleasure. The idyll called *Ma'asé be-Mordecai we-Yoachim* contains a biting satire upon the Czaristic regime and its treatment of the Jews. To these we may add a descriptive poem, *Mayyim Shelanu*, written in 1924, which depicts life under early Bolshevik rule with masterly irony and satire. In all these poems the outstanding feature is the remarkable power of poetic description which the poet manifests. Nothing is too small to escape his attention; the colors of birds, the movements of animals, the kinds of flowers, even the shape, form, and contents of all kinds of food, are all noted and named. Especially noteworthy are the extent of his vocabulary and his inventive talent for nomenclature.

Tschernichowski also translated a number of poetic works from the

Greek and Assyrian, among them *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, the poems of Anacreon, and the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic. He thus enriched Hebrew poetry, besides his own creations, with selections from the classics and ancient Semitic songs.

30. ZALMAN SHENEOR

Zalman Sheneor (1887) is almost unanimously considered the younger member of the triad of shining stars of the post-Haskalah Hebrew poetry, Bialik and Tschernichowski being the other two. Unlike Bialik, who spent his youth entirely immersed in Jewish studies and in an atmosphere of misery and piety, and unlike Tschernichowski who was raised in an environment little saturated with the Jewish spirit but permeated instead with the beauty of nature and joy of life, Sheneor, in his early life, followed a middle course gravitating neither towards one extreme nor the other. His childhood was passed in Shklow, an important industrial center in White Russia containing a large Jewish community, where in the nineties of the last century the typical ghetto life still prevailed, though it had lost much of its rigorousness. His home atmosphere was a Hassidic one, and his education of the ordinary type. He attended the *Heder* and for a short time a Talmudical Academy, but he soon turned to secular studies, and while yet a youth went to Odessa where he came in contact with Bialik, Tschernichowski, and the other writers of that literary center. He sojourned for a number of years in Warsaw and Wilna and then went abroad and lived for several years in Switzerland, Berlin, and ultimately, after the War, in Paris.

His life, being thus of an ordinary character, can hardly explain the nature of his poetry which differs greatly from that of the two older poets. It was possibly partly influenced by the strong secular tendency among the Jewish youth of the larger cities which embodied a spirit of revolt against the traditional Jewish ideology, and, as a reaction against age-long repression of the desire of the senses, an excessive thirst for life and its enjoyment. Sheneor is, to a degree, the poet of this tendency and its followers. I said, in a degree, for there is more to him than mere passionate thirst for life and its pleasures; he knows life in all its phases and he has looked more deeply into it, much beneath the surface reflected in some of his earlier poems.

On the whole, his secularism is the more complete element in him and his humanism far outweighs his Jewishness. Curiously enough,

in spite of his upbringing in a complete Jewish environment, and in spite of his early contact with the poets and leaders of the national movement, there is but slight reflection of the national aspirations in his poetry. Sheneor did not entirely estrange himself from his people, for he feels its suffering and is conscious of the great injustice done to it by the nations of the world as well as of the dignity and nobility of Israel. He expresses these feelings in a powerful way in a number of poems, but he does not know the song of hope of his people,—though it must be admitted that he is still in the midst of his poetic activity and that we can not undertake to prognosticate the future.—Nor does the glorious past of his people hold much interest for him, for there is not among his poems a single one dealing with an historic subject. His Jewish interest is concentrated on the present.

This trait is primarily due to his strong individualism, for Sheneor's poetic genius is mainly expressed in the reaction of his own personality towards life, and to a degree, towards human weakness in its impact with the greater forces of nature and the world. It is these motives which predominate in the larger part of his poems. As a result, his lyrical poems far outnumber those on nature or love, in fact, even those poems are tinged and colored to a large extent with a lyric strain. It is, therefore, in the lyrics that we must look for the key to his poetic spirit, his conception of life and his genius in general. An outstanding characteristic of Sheneor is the spirit of rebellion and struggle revealed in his lyrics. Rebellion is not unknown in modern Hebrew literature and especially in recent poetry. We have already noted that spirit in Tschernichowski, but while in the latter, it is restrained and quite often subdued by other feelings, in Sheneor, it breaks forth with vigorous impetuosity and becomes a dominant force. Storm and restlessness, which often result in a desire to break established rules and to destroy things in the belief that something new and more perfect will be erected in the place of the old, seem to be elements in the poet's character. In one of his stories he tells us of a great passion which had seized him, when he was yet a child, to taste of the pork which the Gentile servant used to bring to his father's house. He was not attracted to it because he imagined it a delicacy for it was dried and usually kept in a dirty dish, but because it was forbidden and therefore looked mysterious. He did not rest until he tasted it. It is these traits of character which impress his poetry and impart variability to his works for he is subject to the mood of the moment. Hence it is

vain to look for uniformity in them. Similarly, in one of his poems entitled *Aspartacus* (Spartacus) in which he glorifies the spirit of rebellion of that ancient leader of the revolt of the slaves, he reveals to us clearly that it is not the justice of the cause which inspired him but the urge to rebel, to struggle against destiny. He exclaims, addressing Spartacus:

The scroll that your adorers raise on high
And study well in secret veneration—
There it is written—there you hear the cry
“Aspire! Aspire! and without limitation,”
For this is all the secret of man’s striving
And this alone the greatness of his soul;
Each code’s a station that upon arriving
You leave again to set another goal.
Each truth’s a tent that beckons a brief shelter
To travel-weary pilgrims as they stray.
These temporary lodgings, helter-skelter,
Bestrew the desert of man’s luckless way.⁵⁶

Again, a yearning for strength, not of the static and permanent type, but of the dynamic kind, and the constant striving towards the new and unknown are not only favorite motives of our poet but are to him integral elements of life and consequently form a part of his philosophy. In quite a number of poems, such as *Tahat ha-Kurnas* (Under the Hammer), *Lah* (To Her), *mi-she-Niknas Abib* (The Entry of Spring), *Hebanti* (I Understood), *Arbit* (Evening), and others, he sings of his desire for strength, of the effect on him of the vicissitudes of life, of the hardening of his heart under the frequent striking of the hammer of time, or of the consciousness of his own strong personality. In *Lah*, speaking to his beloved, he tells her not to weep at his death, for while we may shed tears at the withering of a beautiful flower, we do not cry over a mighty rock which rears its head freely and proudly towards the sky and is suddenly shattered by a natural cataclysm. He strikes the same pose of heroism also in the last two poems. In *Hebanti* he imagines himself as poet to be the very axis of the world and life, and bewails the fact that with his death the song of the world will cease. In *Arbit*, he is distressed because the earth is so flat, while in his own soul there are high mountains and deep abysses and is grieved that people do not follow him in his flight in the clouds. The consciousness of the strength of his own personality creates a gap between

⁵⁶ Collected Poems, Vol. II, p. 73.

the poet and the people at large which engenders in him a contempt for the masses and a desire for aloofness, an urge to climb the heights of Parnassus and to contemplate from its peaks the moving mass of men below. He reveals this attitude in his powerful poem, *Mastémah* (Hatred) in which he expresses his contempt, nay, even hatred for the multitude, for their pusillanimity, narrowness of conception, and circumscription of views. He strives for completeness in man, for breadth of view, and for attaining the heights, and longs for a new generation of men who will be either wholly righteous or wholly wicked, men whose lives will consist of no half-measures but of bold and heroic deeds. In all these poems there is a certain charm, and at the time of their appearance they made a strong appeal to the younger generation on account of the newness of the note, the boldness, and daring which were hitherto not known in Hebrew poetry. Yet, they do not thrill us, as they are intended to, for we are conscious of the pose which the poet assumes and of a lack of naturalness. Moreover, though this desire for strength and for completeness is undoubtedly an important element in Sheneor's personality, yet it is only a phase of the whole, for as stated, the poet is subject to moods, and in one of his less heroic moods he is deeply conscious of the suffering of these very masses from whom he is so anxious to remain aloof. In such poems as *Shirat Lailah* (The Song of the Night) and *Ma'asiyah* (A Story), he gives expression to the pathos of poverty. In the first, he sings of the people who live in darkness. There is a sun in the world, he says, but it overlooks the children of darkness. They, like the prosperous, bow to it, but in vain; the rays of the shining luminary do not fall upon them. The second is a short narrative poem in which a poor mother attempts to still the hunger of her child with a beautiful story about a princess. Charming is the story, but strong is the hunger; the story ceases but the pangs of hunger remain. There is undoubtedly an allegoric tinge to the poem, touching in its pathos and enhanced by the dialogue form in which the mother with her story and the child with its insistent demand for food, take part.

Another elemental trait of Sheneor is his longing and thirst for beauty. The poet to him is the true prophet and in one of his early songs, entitled *mi-Shiré ha-Nabi* (From the Songs of the Prophet), he exclaims grandiloquently:

The great soul of beauty that wanders and strays
And weeps without any to hearken nor praise

I'll boldly embroider with mighty refrain
 Of Triumph's own song. Of my blood and my brain
 I'll willingly give, and then let it fly
 And crash in the face of the world—
 Brazen am I!⁵⁷

Like Tschernichowski, he tells us in *Rayoni* (My Thought) that love and beauty form the essence of life, but unlike him, he introduces a strong personal note into it, inasmuch as he appropriates beauty as his own and constitutes himself as its high priest and prophet, as its very creator. In a quasi-heroic tone he asks the prophet in *La-Nabi* what he is doing in the market-place among the merchants? He tells him that his efforts to bring light to their souls with the rays of beauty and song are vain; their admiration is only flattery, and their enthusiasm is only momentary. However, as far as the poet is concerned, he is all athirst for beauty and light. He therefore beseeches the sun in another poem, *We-Hayah ki-Yéred Kaw Zahab* (When the Golden Ray Descends), to send down its rays to warm his heart. He prays for them, even though, as he says, he is often conscious that this light and beauty is illusory, but his heart clings to that illusion and longs for it, for life is so prosaic.

This last note which emphasizes the illusion in life is of great importance. It explains the transition from the poems hitherto described to a group of songs which are of a contrary nature. In fact, this poet of light and beauty is only apparently so, while in reality there is a deep strain of pessimism in his view of the world and life. He is intensely conscious of the instability of human happiness, of the darkness hovering around the light, of the struggle between man and nature, and of his weakness in his impact against its mighty forces of which he is ignorant. In one of his early poems, *Zmeim* (Thirsty), where he speaks of the thirst for light, he already hints that at times man cannot bear that light and that he longs for darkness; and similarly in another, written about the same time, he expresses the thought that when man is satiated with happiness he is hopeless, for he has nothing to strive for, and that beneath that happiness misfortune lurks. At times, inspired by the severe struggle of man against nature, he breaks forth into prophecy, as in *Hazon ha-Adam* (Visions of Man), saying that ultimately man will triumph over all obstacles, and he will be enwrapped, like God at the creation of the world, in a mantle of light.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 11.

This, however, does not comfort him, for the victory will be only for humanity as a whole but not for the individual. He hears the eternal song of life in which tones of joy and sorrow mingle. He knows that this song will go on forever, for one generation succeeds another, but alas, the hearts cease to beat while the world is still hungry for the song. He, therefore, says in his poem, *Ani Éni Mebakkeh et ha-Hayyim* (I Do Not Weep Over Life), that at his death it will not be the loss of his own life which will pain him but the vision of the future in which the world will continue to progress; new inventions, new sources for happiness will be discovered, but he, the individual, will not be there. He admires the human struggle and the march of civilization, but on looking deeper into life he sees that all this effort gives no happiness to man. Men long for the warmth of love, for pure faith, but seldom find them. There are sparks but they do not unite into one great fire. In such moments of depression he penned, while yet a youth, his most pessimistic song, *Ma'aseh* (A Tale), in which he says that both life and death are purposeless games invented by two evil angels and that he is at a loss to solve the riddle, for though it is hard to live, yet we do not want to die.

Thus, the very same poet of light sings to us of the sorrow and pain of life revealing the reverse of the medal. It is a mood, but one which recurs again and again. In fact, it serves as a leaven in all of his love and nature poems, for it may well be that this pessimism is the cause of his thirst for love, for enjoyment of a fleeting life. Like Kohelet of old, he says, "Rejoice, young man, in thy youth," and with the ancient Epicureans he preaches the doctrine of *Carpe Diem*, "Do not let a day slip by without enjoyment." Hence his passionate love poems. Tschernichowski also sings of love, but with him, it assumes a glamor of nobility and purity, while with Sheneor, it is more an expression of impetuous passion. With the exception of one of his early poems, *Et Kol Lebah Mosra Lo* (She Surrendered to Him Her Whole Heart), which charms us by its fine description of the beauty of the beloved and by the purity of feeling, all his love poems are permeated with the erotic spirit. The poems *ba-Derek* (On the Road), *be-Lail Heshek* (On a Night of Passion), *Widui* (Confession), *Ken Noshkim Anahnu* (Thus We Kiss), *Hobot* (Debts)—all breathe of unrestrained passion, of a storm of desire, of love as an intoxication in which man wants to drown a gnawing sorrow which, from time to time, breaks forth.

His relation to woman is peculiar; she plays a very important part

in his life, envelops his being, not because of the qualities of her soul, or as a symbol of the finer emotions or of maternal devotion, but primarily as the source of pleasure and intoxication. We, therefore, note that despite his admiration of and attraction for her, he rebels against her power and often prays to be liberated from her net, and when finding himself unable to attain freedom, he hates his enchantress.

His nature poems display some of the characteristics of his lyrics. Being primarily a poet of life which is full of strife and struggle, he personifies nature and endows it with the same qualities. He imparts these traits even to inanimate nature, and visualizes a silent strife for mastery going on between its static and dynamic parts. As an admirer of strength and stability he is greatly impressed by the might and hugeness of the mountains, and as a result he excels many Hebrew poets in depicting the majesty and beauty of the Alps and the interrelation of life and nature. In his shorter poems, light is, as noted, a leading motive and the sun is the theme of a number of these. However, it is not the sunrise nor the dawn, favorite of all poets, which enchant him, but the sunset with its dying beauty, with its numerous colors and hues, its struggle with the oncoming shadows of night which he sings about. In *'Im ha-Ereb* (At Eventide), he describes the departure of the sun:

Still trails the golden hem of dying day
Upon the earth below,
And in the western clouds still flow
Its last few drops of blood.
The pale moon rises weary and forlorn
With all but faded countenance, to mourn
The passing of the soul of Day.
The whole world turns to glances, and each one,
Each yearning glance turns to the sun.⁵⁸

He continues to depict the longing of the earth for Father Sun, disregarding the caresses of the moon. This motive is repeated with various nuances in several poems. In *'Im Lailah* (The Entrance of the Night), he portrays the striving of the night to conquer the earth and drive away the remnants of the dying light. He is aware of the beauties of the night and depicts gracefully the reflection of the moon in the quiet lake, but like many Hebrew poets, he is afraid of its mystery.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

He returns to the strife between light and shadow once more in '*Awel* (Injustice) in which he describes the battle royal between the last rays of the sun and the shadows ready to swallow them. Snow is another favorite theme of the poet, and he sings of its brightness and of its purity covering many ugly things beneath, and at times of the flight and dance of the crystal flakes. In his desire for personification, he introduces the erotic element in nature speaking of the snowflakes as numerous children born of the union of the wind and earth.

His tendency to endow nature with human qualities and interrelate it with life, primarily with his personal life, is especially evident in poems in which the world of plants is the theme. Such are *Progin* (Poppies) and *be-Yerah Bul* (In the Month of September). The first has much lyrical content. The field of red poppies flooded by the bright light of the sun, like a burning flame, symbolizes to him the heat and passion of youth and he, therefore, sings hymns to the scarlet flowers, to love, to youth and its impetuosity. He also entwines a love scene depicting the meetings with his beloved in the midst of the field of poppies and even introduces a Jewish note. The glowing red of the flowers conjures up before him, the son of the hot Orient, visions of the burning sands of the desert, as well as the scenes of the Jewish rebellion against the Romans in which the red blood of the heroes flowed from their wounds. It concludes, however, as most lyrics, with a note of disappointment. The bright color of the poppies fade with the passing of the summer, and when early fall arrives, the petals wither and in their stead the black seeds, containing the fatty oil, appear. This symbolizes to our poet the subsiding of passion, the fading of the dreams of youth, and the stability of the more practical aspects of life which are so distasteful to the impetuous bard. The second is a beautiful detailed description of the early fall, of the ripening of the fruits and vegetables, the heavily-laden trees, of the plants in the fullness of their growth, maturity, and development. The delightful quality of the poem consists in the personification of each plant and fruit, endowing it with human features and traits, in short, animation of nature. Some plants which are used in the preparation of more or less typically Jewish foods are endowed with special traits. On reading the poem, we enter in a magical world in which nature and human life are closely interrelated and interwoven.

However, were we to evaluate Sheneor's poetic genius on the basis of his shorter poems hitherto described, we would adjudge him un-

doubtedly a great poet but would not have placed him alongside of Bialik and Tschernichowski. But there is much more to this younger eagle. He wrote a number of longer poems of a different quality in which his genius is revealed to us in its fullest strength and he appears to us not only as one of the great Hebrew poets, but takes an honorable place among the chosen bards of world literature. These poems are divided into four groups: (a) those treating of nature but are permeated with a lyrical spirit; (b) those depicting the struggle of civilized man with nature; (c) purely lyrical; and (d) poems of Jewish content. Their form varies; at times, the descriptive element predominates and at times the narrative; occasionally also the didactic but often all three forms are mingled together. All of these are permeated not only with beauty but also with a spirit of reflection and saturated with the personality of the singer, for Sheneor is not an objective but a subjective poet.

To the first group belong two cycles, *be-Horim* (In the Mountains), one hundred and eighty pages long, and *mi-Shiré Harz* (Songs of the Harz Mountains). The former contains a prologue, four parts divided into cantos, and an epilogue. The prologue impresses us greatly. It tells of the poet's first meeting with the glorious Alps. He, an exile, the son of cold Russia, greets the land of the mountains "on which the breath of the Almighty and His power are preserved from the time of its creation." He confesses to the mighty rocks that he is a stranger to them for he was raised by a gloomy stepmother—the *Galut* (Exile)—who follows him wherever he goes, inoculating his life with sorrow and gloom. He knocks for admission, presenting his passport, a piece of parchment from the scroll of the Torah, scorched on all sides, and a drop of blood on the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder."—This was written after the Kishinew pogrom when Sheneor left Russia.—He concludes by asking permission to absorb the beauty, light, and color which this wonderful world possesses. Then follows the first part, *Agadat ha-Abib* (The Legend of the Spring), in which both winter and the arrival of spring in the mountains are described in stately lines. Especially charming is the picture of the struggle of winter with his enemy, spring. Winter is personified as a gloomy old man sitting on the top of the highest peak and cruelly sending down his blasts on the valley below. But his time comes; suddenly a warm wind springs up; the snow melts and winter retreats. The chapter concludes with a legend about the maiden, Spring,

sleeping in a cave guarded by Winter until she is finally awakened by the sun.

The second part, *Shirah she-ba-Héd* (The Song of the Echo), is really the song of the Alps. The poet animates them and endows them with a soul, which is hidden in their mighty crags and enormous mass. He sees its reaction to the seasons and weather, but above all, he hears its song in the echo. The songs are numerous, and one of them is the heavy thud of the falling rocks. A sublime description of the process of the tottering rocks sliding down the valley then follows. At first there is the murmur of the torrents which, in their swift flight from the bonds of the rocks, undermine the very foundations of the boulders, and these, endowed by the poet with a feeling of animosity which the immovable mass, the unfruitful, bears towards everything moving and fruitful, tumble down with a rumble into the valley below, crushing the humble huts of the shepherds and snuffing out the life of the dwellers therein. The chapter concludes with the unspoken song of the mountains in which they express their unbounded strength, their silent struggle with man, and the consciousness of their victory, for:

Men spend their days in cages of stone
And in their death slabs of stone close the graves;
Stone, stone, stone.

Manginat ha-Zugot (The Melody of the Bells) is the title of the third part which is a complete poem in itself. Its theme is the melody of the bells on the necks of the cattle pasturing in the glades of the mountains, but in reality, the poem contains a veritable mosaic of motives. There is a beautiful tale of mountain fairies who endow the echo with power and vivacity, an exquisite description of a hollow amidst the peaks full of glory and charm, and then a poetic picture of man wandering among the mountains, his "yodeling" expressing only his weakness and insignificance as compared with the giants around him, for it is

The song of the king of life humbled in captivity
Among the mighty rulers who guard
The gates of time and vicissitudes of life.

The din of the bells conjure up before the poet visions of other days and resuscitate forgotten dreams associated with the melody of bells. The part is concluded with a reflective poem. While listening to the

song of the bells in the evening calm, his thoughts are awakened. He hears in succession the stormy melody of youth, the calmer song of middle age, and finally the sorrowful tune of slow-moving old age, and all life seems blurred, and he asks:

Each soul with its own truth I spy.
 Each truth containing its own lie.
 "And where is truth?" say I,
 "Pray, tell me what's a lie?
 And when will men this network trace
 These paths that twist and wind through space?
 Ding! Dong!
 Of all these pathways, the true one is each
 Unto the boundless Infinite they reach.

Again,

Who lies there silent?
 What lowly figure do I scan?
 A son of man! A son of man!
 What is his thought—his spirit's breath?
 Death!
 Ha! Ha! Ding Dong!
 There is no death—no life! You see
 The scales are balanced evenly,
 The law is just eternally.
 For life begins where Death appears to be,
 And where things mould and rot your eyes may see,
 The poppies below most red.
 And no one knows the border or the bound
 The voice of echoes speaks with faintest sound
 Ding! Dong! Dell!⁵⁹

After the fourth part which gives an exceptionally charming and dramatic description of the fall in the mountains which includes numerous exquisite scenes of idyllic life in the valleys below, we come to the epilogue, '*Abim, Galim, Horim* (Clouds, Waves, and Mountains). This is a reflective poem in which Sheneor expresses a pantheistic idea, namely that the creative thought of God on issuing from His mind divided itself into three parts, one of which was embodied in the restless sea, the other, in the wandering clouds, and the third, congealed in the towering mountains, symbolizing stability and the great silence. The poem contains a grand scene, portraying the meeting of the three, the lapping of the waves at the foot of the

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 224-5.

mountains, reflecting the blue of the clouds above and enhanced by the play of the rays of the sun on all three, completing the great symphony of nature. The closing poem approaches the sublime and thrills us with its grandeur.

The motive of the second cycle is mainly the relation of life to nature, the influence of the heights on man, the revelation to man of his own insignificance in face of the eternal calm of peaks and crags, and the effect of such revelation on poets. Two of the poems are devoted to Goethe and Uhland who sojourned for a time in the Harz Mountains. A charming poem is the third entitled *Bet Haroshet* (A Factory) portraying the incongruity of the existence of an iron foundry in the heart of the towering peaks. The contrast between this foundry which belches smoke covering the pure green of the soil with soot and ashes and producing iron which is later converted into bullets and cannons with the calmness and eternal peace of the lofty mountains surrounding it, is masterfully depicted.

A strong Jewish note is injected in the powerful poem *Tahat Shemesh* (Under the Sun). Its lyric tone is purely individual; the poet attempts to analyze his own personality, his passion, his restlessness, and explains it by his descent. He is a son of Asia, descended from a people which lived in a hot desert and in a sun-drenched land. It is the effect of the sun on his blood which imparts to it its heat, passion, and restlessness. He contrasts it with life in exile in cold Russia and the drab Jewish life in the ghetto. He rebels against it and expresses his protest in a fine though unorthodox passage:

Israel who lavished saviours and the light of prophecy
On savages and swineherds, and revealed
To every brutish brigand his bright store,
His radiant dreams to wild bears of the field.
And thus he wasted, scattered all his wealth
And thus was plundered—left without a rag
Bequeathed unto his children only this—
Some parchment scraps of Temple and of flag.⁶⁰

Thus speaks the escaped son of the ghetto, the rebel who seeks light and life.

To the second group, comprising songs of the struggle of man with nature, belongs his trilogy, *mi-Shiré ha-Goral* (Songs of Destiny), consisting of the poems: (a) *Shirat Koré ha-Zuhab* (The Song of the

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 270.

Gold Digger); (b) *Shirat Dole Peninim* (The Song of the Pearl-Fisher); and (c) *Shirat 'Ish ha-Ruah* (The Song of the Man of the Spirit). In the first two occupations which are full of danger and risk, the poet sees the strongest expression of the determination of the human will to wrest from an unwilling nature its treasures and secrets. The unequal struggle of puny man with mighty nature, man going down into the bowels of the earth to search for a few grains of gold locked in millions of tons of hard granite, moored in its fastness for innumerable ages, or man braving the hazards of the deep, fishing for a tiny pearl shell, caught his fancy and he embodied this romance in the poems. Their value lies in the detailed description of the interior of the earth as well as of the bottom of the sea, on the one hand, and the harmonious combination of human motives and scenes of struggle into one grand picture, on the other hand.

In his usual manner of animating nature and endowing matter with the qualities of life, he vivifies the unequal struggle. The gold-digger and the many-colored rocks in the interior of the earth are two enemies facing each other. The hard layers of granite, the crags of flint are not passive but in their grim silence they express revolt, as if saying, "Strike us, batter us, but we will not move." The gold-digger feels the resistance and even seems to hear the warning of the rocks urging him to abandon his quest, for Satan, king of darkness, covered the gold with his mantle. What is more, he mixed some of his darkness into the gold, for "night often issues from gold and misery from treasures." He, however, is not dismayed and with assiduity plies his pick deeper into the bowels of the earth. The ringing of his pick, striking the rocks, conjures up to him visions of the use to which the gold will be put. It will unite two lovers by a marriage ring; it will glisten in the crown of kings, and glimmer in the darkness of temples. Yet, the gold-digger is not moved by the ultimate results but by his own desire, inexplicable as it may be, to dig and dig and wrest from nature its secrets. His reward is conquest. The same strife is dramatized with still greater skill in the poem, *The Pearl-Fisher*. The depth of the sea with its numerous animals is described with precision of a naturalist, the struggle of the puny fisher with the mighty spirit of the sea for its treasures—he calls the spirit, Sandalphon after the name of an angel mentioned in the Talmud instead of the classic name, Poseidon—are portrayed both powerfully and with a wealth of color and rich imagery.

In the *Song of the Man of Spirit* there is the same motive—of man's struggle—not with nature but with himself. In this poem, Sheneor reveals to us the tragedy of the poet, the creator, as he conceives him, and here his pessimism comes to the fore. The Man of Spirit bares the secrets of his soul and his tragic fate. He knows all, but doubts all; he warms others, but his heart is cold; he sings of holiness, light, and innocence, but looking deeper into life as he does, he knows that good needs its opposite in order to be effective and that evil is as necessary as good. He sifts out from the mass of ugliness in life the sparks of beauty, weaving them one by one into a work of art. But for whom? Who are the heirs? Are there many? He does not want their praise and certainly loathes their criticism. The real heirs are few, and who and where are they? Yet with all these doubts and inner suffering and struggle, a voice calls to the Man of Spirit, "Be silent, and create. This is your destiny." This poem is, like the other two, a composite creation, but the harmony of the parts is less complete and less perfect than in the former. The poet overreached himself, for the subject is too personal. Sheneor is no singer who sings freely and naturally, but a poet, a thinker who sees the deeper side of life and creates in pain. His joy and passion are, as noted, an effort at drowning the gnawing pain in a storm of passion.

These contrary traits, revealed in the last poem, which dwell in the poet's heart side by side, are expressed sporadically in his lyrical poems. His love for the noble traits of man which is deeply ingrained in him in spite of his frequent assertion of his hatred of the masses is manifested in the poem, *ha-Teda Mah Sipper ha-Kor' Li* (Dost Thou Know What the Cold Told Me)? It has as its motive an ancient legend. The Spirit of Winter loves a beautiful queen whose dwelling is on the peaks of the Alps in a palace of crystal. She is the enemy of warmth. As the price of her love she asks her lover for the last portion of the warmth of the heart of man. Winter storms and throws his cold blasts on man to obtain the coveted warmth, but in vain. He is vanquished. Man clings to the warmth of his heart in spite of the threats of furious winter.

Pathetic and touching is the poem, *Matanah* (A Present), in which a scene of a dying girl waiting for the visit of her betrothed is portrayed. Instead, a stranger enters and in his hand there is a present from her beloved. In a long monologue he tells her of the great struggle of the few idealists among whom were the messenger and the betrothed

against the powers of evil in the world. In the struggle, the beloved fell and as a present to his fiancée he sent her his handkerchief dipped in his blood. When the stranger finishes his monologue, the girl is dead. There are stirring passages in the poem, especially the one which describes the love between man and man, brothers in arms in the struggle for an ideal. The poem was written under the influence of the frequent risings in Russia by the liberal and radical youth against the Czarist regime which often ended in disaster. There is admiration for the idealism, but no enthusiasm for the cause, for there is also the inquiry, "What does the spot of blood tell? Does it complain of the futile loss of the power of youth or does it demand revenge?" Yet as a whole, it is symbolic of all struggles for ideals.

At other times, the poet's spirit of rebellion, his love for constant strife, for storms of passion and conquest breaks forth and he mocks at visionary idealism. Such is his ironical poem, *we-Hayah be-Aharit ha-Yomim* (And There Will Be in the End of Days) in which he satirizes the Messianic ideal of a "lamb dwelling in peace with a wolf" with great force and skill. His portrayal of the peace which will reduce the mighty and fiery spirit to the level of the weak and the meek, of the utilitarian aim of life and of the death of passion is done with biting irony and is impressive though it may repel the more ideally-minded. The last chapter of this poem is an ode to the *Yezzer ha-Ra'*, symbolizing passion and desire, which to him is the salt of life. Yet we cannot agree with the judgment of one of the critics that the poem is a blasphemous attack against the Jewish Messianic ideal. It is only a mood of the poet reflecting an angle of his view of life.

He knows other moods, as we have noted, and one of them is the weakness of man, even of the highest type, the poet, whose tragedy he so well described in the song, *The Man of Spirit*. A phase of this tragedy is also expressed in the poem, *Nekōim* (Pessimistic Reflections), where he tells of the fear with which he is often seized lest his creations are not his own but that he had appropriated some crumbs of thought, floating in the world from eternity to eternity. And alas, the individual passes but the thought continues. He is then frightened by infinity, wonders at the riddle of world and life and bewails the fate of the great spirits who blaze a way for humanity but they themselves are so lonely.

Sheneor knows also Jewish tragedy and sings about it in several poems expressing it in its fullest depth with dignity and vigorous

protest. Curiously enough, his first Jewish poem is only a part of a larger work called, *Taḥat Zillelé ha-Mandolina* (Under the Influence of the Notes of the Mandolin). He uses as a device the notes of the mandolin as played by a dark-skinned Italian girl. The first cheerful tones call out in him emotions of joy, passion, and youth. They also recall to him as in a vision the feasts of ancient Rome saturated with beauty. These, in turn, call forth a reaction, the uncertainty of happiness, the prosaic character of modern civilization from which beauty and glory have departed. He then sings a hymn to this departed glory of the ancient world and accuses religion for the death of beauty, describing in powerful lines its deterrent effect upon man. However, though faith has died in our days, nothing has taken its place. Then follows the poem, *Manginot Yisrael* (The Melodies of Israel). The mandolin continues to play; the vision disappears and a new one takes its place, the triumph of ancient Rome over Judea in which there is a succession of scenes: first, the burning of the Temple, the crackling of the flames in the glorious halls, then the images of the rebel leaders whose blood still flows in the poet's veins followed by scenes of captive youths led into amphitheatres. The poet's ire rises and he speaks to the daughter of Italy—symbol of ancient Rome—of the revenge which his people took, not with blood and iron, but with presenting the conquerors a pale God who crushed the beautiful pagan deities under His foot. Still more is the revenge of the Book, and the singer exclaims:

Where is there a holy book in which you do not hear
The swish of Jordan's waters and the rustle of the Lebanon?
Where is there a chapel or a shrine
Wherein you do not catch the echo
Of the son of Amram's voice or Psalms of David's praise?
Where is the canvas, marble, or the bronze
Which does not speak the language of the ancients—
The low-voiced stirring of awakening matter
That heartfelt something of my treasured prophets
And the dreams and visions of their light,
The gentle dropping of Creation's dew
From out the pages of our Genesis,
The sad-sweet vintage of Kohelet.
The exultation of the Song of Songs?⁶¹

The singer then turns to the exile. With pride he tells that he is an exiled prince, that he has many documents of nobility written in blood

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 331.

and tears signed by God Himself and testified to by the Messiah of the Christians and the prophet of the Arabs. But alas, the notes are protested and the Jew remains the poor nobleman deprived of his riches. However, the scion of ancient lineage has only contempt for the young upstarts and faces a world of hatred with pride and thunders forth in spite of all, "I will not submit." There are many passages breathing with rebellion even against God Himself, with wrath against the tormentors of Israel, and also some in which there is a Zionist note, expressing a desire to return to the sun-drenched land of old. There is also an erotic tinge here and there, for Sheneor always mingles the personal with the national, but the poem as a whole can hardly be matched in Hebrew literature in vigor, thought, and beauty of expression.

Another phase of the Jewish tragedy is revealed in the masterful poem, *Yemé ha-Benayyim Mitkarbim* (The Middle Ages Are Approaching). It was written in 1913 before the World War when apparently the liberal spirit still prevailed in Europe. But with the intuition of a seer the poet senses the oncoming change and he issues his warning to his people that the old fog of Mediaeval hatred is thickening and about to cover the horizon. He hears the scratching of the nails of the serpent of animosity in the dark and sees it snapping its bonds which the liberal spirit placed upon it for a time. He is quite aware that hatred assumed a new name. It speaks no more in the name of religion but in the name of patriotism, but the change is only for the worse, and with a trained hand he portrays the hypocrisy, duplicity, and nakedness of the false patriotism moving the policy and diplomacy of nations. The secret of the hatred of the Jew, divines the poet, is that he is still wrapped in the mantle of his eternal personality, harboring both modesty and aloofness. The bard then turns to his own people, encouraging them in their struggle for existence, and prophesying that their destiny is not yet fulfilled, their role on the stage of history is yet to come, and the ideals to which they cling so tenaciously will still be realized.

Sheneor was also not insensible to some of the beautiful traits of the Jewish ghetto life and in several of his shorter poems, such as *Tablin* (Spice), *ha-Zaddik Ba* (The Zaddik Comes), he depicts several idyllic scenes of that life, such as the Sabbath meals and the joy caused by the arrival of a Hassidic leader in the small town. The crown of his poems of Jewish life is *Wilna*. This ancient Jewish community, often called

the Jerusalem of Lithuania, found its poet in Sheneor. He endows its past, its traditions, and legends with life, with love, and adoration. He portrays every trait of this great beehive of Jewish and human activity. Nothing escapes his all-seeing eye and sharp ear; the mournful melody of the prayer, the hum of the press at the famous printing-house of the widow Rom which had spread knowledge and learning through Israel, the image of the high-browed, long-bearded *Parnasim* and the whines of the beggars—all are depicted. Nor are the various foods of Wilna missing; each part of the picture receives its share. Likewise is the natural beauty of the place portrayed in glowing colors. Very artistic and even touching is the fifth chapter in which he challenges the statue of Moses, cast in bronze, standing at the entrance of a quadrangle of churches, to move from its place and come to the Jewish quarters and reproaches the peerless leader for guarding the sanctuaries of others. In poetic ire he exclaims:

Who will judge?
 They claim our God, our Book, our Law as their possession,
 Our fathers as their patriarchs they claim
 Our prophets too! Alas, the same aggression
 Appropriates them all, and to our shame.
 And Moses too, for whom the heavens thundered?
 Alas, how sorely are we plundered!⁶²

Towards the end of the poem there is also a note of pathos when the war-torn Wilna is portrayed with its abject poverty, when thousands of refugees were lying in the streets, and the ancient Jewish community, distinguished for its charity, could not take care of the aged and the poor, feed the hungry, and shelter the wanderers. This poem is an everlasting monument to a great community with its glorious past and its checkered life of the present. Thus sang Sheneor of light, love, nature, and of the suffering and life of his people.

31. *JACOB COHEN, JACOB FICHMAN, AND DAVID SHIMONOWITZ.*

i. Jacob Cohen (1881), a somewhat older contemporary of Sheneor, is a prolific poet, and like him, versatile in his production, for he is equally at home in lyrics, nature songs, idyllic, semi-narrative, and love poems. There is much similarity in the two as far as method, technique and general approach are concerned, for Cohen is also permeated

⁶² Vol. II, p. 275.

with the general human spirit and with a natural attitude towards life and the world, unknown to ghetto and Yeshibah-bred poets—he was born in a village in close proximity to the beauties of nature—but he differs greatly from Sheneor in the content and spirit of his poems. He attempts at times, whether in conscious or unconscious imitation of the former or of Tschernichowski, to display a spirit of rebellion and a passion for strength and prowess, but this is more of a pose rather than a real trait of character and expression of poetic genius. He is a romantic soul and he excels in portraying the quieter and more restful phases of the beauty of life and nature. He is a master of plasticism, but his colors are not fast and exciting, and his tints, though charming in their blend, are delicate. He also differs from Sheneor in his Jewishness and relation to the national movement of his time. He not only knows the song of sorrow of his people but also that of hope. The number of his national poems equals, if not exceeds, that of his general. Furthermore, there is also an evident religious note in his poetry, a thing almost unknown in the production of the age, for he does not, like Sheneor, accuse religion of being the destroyer of beauty, nor like Tschernichowski incline back to paganism, nor does he, like Bialik, reproach God for His impotence to protect the chosen people. On the contrary, he displays a positive reverence towards the author of all being, a desire to unite with Him, and a poetic recognition of His manifestation in the world. All these traits are expressed directly or indirectly in his nature and lyrical poems. A fundamental characteristic of the latter is his optimistic attitude towards life. In one of his early songs, *Tanhumim* (Comfort), he protests against the assertion that life is vain and an illusion. Nay, says he, the world is beautiful and even struggle has its charm. He therefore exclaims:

With thousands of God's melodies we'll sing
The Song of life—the heart's own song.⁶³

The same motive is repeated in *Yeshnah Sha'ah* (There is an Hour), in which he joyfully declares that the very hum of life is to him the voice of the Song of Songs.

He is, of course, not entirely unaware of the less happier phases of life, such as the apparent monotony and the continuous fading of beautiful dreams. He also satirizes the mediocrity of man in *Shir ha-Zefardéim* (The Song of the Frogs), in which he says that the croaking

⁶³ Collected Poems, Vol. I, p. 29.

of the frogs seems to repeat constantly the warning against flight of fantasy and the striving for wide vistas, and teaches us the more prosaic, but the more sheltered and established way of life. At times even a note of pessimism is heard in his songs. He grieves at the days that passed and left only disappointment and sorrow in their wake, for the quest of life was not found and ideals not realized. "And who knows," says he, "but that one bright morning, the master of the scythe—death—will come and knock at the door." In such moments he expresses a desire to clutch at life, enjoy it to its full in the intoxication of passion, for he sings, "Spring of life comes only once to man, and who knows what the morrow will bring?"

Still, the predominant note is the optimistic one, which is expressed by him in different nuances. At times, as in the poem, *Oshri* (My Happiness), he sings of happiness, for though it is fleeting and often involves pain, yet it beautifies and enriches the life of man, as it is his destiny to be happy and unhappy at the same time. In *mi-Shiré Elem Bahir* (The Song of a Bright Youth), he expresses his self-sufficiency and satisfaction with his lot in spite of his disappointment with the ways of men. He sees the falsehood and deception prevailing in society and feels the mocking of his friends at his idealism and innocence, yet he is not disturbed. The beauty of the world and the gift of God, "the golden harp" which is his poetic genius, afford him the happiness he fails to find in human society. In *Oibi* (My Enemy), he assures us that he will retain his calm and self-possession even when death arrives. Death is his eternal enemy; he met him while a young child when his mother died. Again, he experienced its terror when it nipped his first love by the decease of the young girl he loved. Still later, he cut down with his scythe the finest flower of Jewry of modern times—referring to Herzl. Still, with all that, says the poet, when he will meet death for the last time, his enemy will find in him no terror, no fright, but calmness, and thus, though vanquished, victory will be his.

Longing for beauty, striving for life, are other traits of his lyrics, and he expresses them in a number of poems, but always with confidence, with a feeling that in spite of obstacles, man will conquer. He thus concludes his poem, *Shirat ha-Adam* (Song of Man):

I live with the universe, I strive with the universe,
I strive forever, I live, live forever.
I am the man.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

His lyrics are also distinguished by their Jewish and religious notes. The former is expressed in his poem, *Bat ha-Galut* (The Daughter of Exile), in which, in the manner of the time, our poet protests against the spirit of the *Galut*, which appearing to him like a sorrowful maiden, envelops him as with a cloud. He struggles to liberate himself from that cloud and in anger exclaims,

“Exile is not only a punishment but also a sin.”

He is unsuccessful in his struggle for the sorrow remains with him, and the cloud begins to disperse only when it is penetrated by a ray of hope.

Religious yearning serves as a motive in several poems. In one, as in *Pené Adonai* (The Face of the Lord), he prays for the gift of divine knowledge, of the all-comprehensive and all-embracing type. He is even ready to sacrifice his life for one moment of the light of God. In another, *Elohim lo Yada'ati Olamkha* (God, I do Not Know Thy World), he expresses a strong desire to know the world in its fullest beauty, all its moves and secrets, its inner essence and soul, and when conscious of man's inability to attain such knowledge he exclaims, “O, God, why hast Thou humiliated me?” Echoes of this deep longing for God and the mystery of His being are heard also in many other poems, a trait which places his lyrics in sharp contrast to those of many contemporary Hebrew poets.

His numerous nature poems are distinguished by the same features of tenderness, calmness, and love for the quiet beauty of nature, for its harmony rather than for its outbursts and impetuosity. Like all Hebrew poets, he longs for the light of the sun, and in one of them he pleads with it and asks for the permanent gift of its rays in which life palpitates. However, the night holds no terrors for him; on the contrary, he revels in its beauty. The charm of the evening and the night form, therefore, frequent motives of his nature poems. In *Marot Elohim* (Visions of God), he describes with special art the tints and colors of the sunset, but unlike Sheneor, who speaks of such scenes as the funeral of the sun, Cohen enjoys the calm of the eventide and his soul is overwhelmed by the beauty which he designates a Vision of God. These nuances appear to us in their full glory in *Shekiat Hamah* (Sunset), in which the poet's skill of portrayal of the colors of the sunset and then reflection in the evening sky is revealed at its best, thus:

Behold the heavens! A devouring flame
 Has taken hold of them.
 The sun with fiery kiss has touched
 And set afire their hem.
 Along the far horizon crested clouds,
 And boldly sculptured, run
 Like craggy cliffs, gold-bordered,
 'Neath the sun.
 Like fish or denizens of the great sea
 Some large—some small, they seem.
 As though they had been dipped in blood of youth and
 purity
 Or bathed in fires of flaming Serafim
 Or laved by light of Heaven's radiant beam.⁶⁵

He is still more enchanted by the night, the dark beauty lighted by the glimmer of the stars and the pale moon. The calmness and the restfulness of nature which soothe him is exquisitely portrayed in several poems of which *be-Lail Kayiz* (In a Summer Night) and *mi-Negohot be-Lailah* (Night Glimmers) and *Alé Bomote Neshef* (The Height of Evening) are the best. The last is also permeated with a personal note in which the singer tells us of his being so completely attuned to nature that he sings the song of the universe always at night when man sleeps and the stars and God are his audience. This religious note is heard in many other nature poems and culminates in *Derek Shubi* (On My Return), a song of joy at his return to the Alps in the following lines:

At last I have returned unto my God
 The God I know and you know not at all,
 Creation's symphony directing with a nod
 Whose grandeur, strength, and glory fall
 Upon the mountains.
 I am a part of the world, and yet with the world I war
 I war for aye, and I'll live for evermore!
 I am Man!⁶⁶

Cohen, like Sheneor, was greatly impressed by the beauty and majesty of the Alps and the charm of Switzerland and wrote a cycle of poems entitled *Helweziah* (Helvetia) in which he sings of the mountains, streams, lakes and the quaint cities of that wonderful land. He lacks the vigor, depth of thought, and the note of personification

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

displayed by the former, but he excels in plastic portrayal of the more quiet beauty in its manifold as reflected in the snow-covered peaks, the wide vistas, the blue lakes, and the murmuring mountain brooks. His poems '*Al ha-Mayyim* (On the Waters) and *Ma'al la-Ananim* (Above the Clouds), depicting the vistas revealed to the onlooker from the top of the mountain Rigi are masterpieces. Especially charming in his poem, *Yeor ha-Tekelet* (The Blue Lake) in the canton of Berne. Utilizing a motive of Heine, applied by him to Judah ha-Levi, he ascribes the origin of the lake to a tear which flowed from the eye of the Creator when He completed the creation of Switzerland and its beauty charmed Him. It was a tear of joy which fell among the Alps and it became the Blue Lake.

Idyllic charm and plastic description are the two outstanding characteristics of this cycle. The latter is evident in the poem, *Ir ha-Dubim* (City of Bears, i.e. Berne) in which a picture is drawn of that city containing many fine lyrical passages, among them one about the universality. This passage, pregnant with thought, describes human reason as a heavenly bird, sharp of eye and beak, whose flight is higher than that of all winged creatures, but which often falls heavily to the ground, and this master flyer frequently beats at the bars of its prison—a fine lyrical note expressing the tragedy of human reason. Thus, Cohen saturates us with the beauty of nature, infuses us with its calm, and delights us with his plastic description, and on occasion gives us a glimpse into the tragic.

Similar traits characterize his love poems which, however, are few. Tenderness is their outstanding feature. There is little of the erotic and outburst of passion in them, and many have disappointment in love as their motive. In *Leil Horef* he sings of love as spring in the midst of winter which warms his soul, though the blizzards rage. Yet he confesses that life is holier to him than love, and though he is deeply wounded by disappointment, he will not destroy his life for he is a descendant of the Hebrew race to whom existence is sacred. Moreover, he says, his heart contains untold treasures which no woman ever uncovered. Love is a boon, but he has still greater boons. Only once he penned an erotic phantasy, *Lilit* (The Queen of Demons) which is vigorous and passionate. There are also a few love songs in which the tempo rises and we have fine descriptions of feminine beauty. Such are his charming cycle of short poems, *Accordim Nitakim* (Stray Accords). The soothing power of love and the peacefulness it brings

to the soul are beautifully expressed in a poem, entitled *Igrot* (Letters).

Cohen, as stated, was greatly influenced by the national movement and his national and Jewish songs which form more than one half of his poetic productions are numerous. His Jewishness is genuine, he feels deeply the Jewish tragedy, but the note of hope is predominant, as he says himself in his introductory poem to the volume of national songs.

'Mid Time's upheavals and the Tempest's roar
My harp's voice raised its lonely meditation;
At times it cried or sobbed, but evermore
Its song of songs was consolation.⁶⁷

Being strongly permeated with the spirit of Zionism, he was impatient with the slow progress of the movement and with the deafness of the people to this new melody in their life and he poured forth his chagrin in two poems, *li-Yeshené Shahrit* (To Those Who Sleep in the Morning) and *Yahid* (Alone). In the first he strikes a tone of prophecy warning the sleepers that light will awaken them by force, and in the second he is more impatient, bewailing the apathy of his people in strong words and especially his loneliness in their midst. Yet this apathy and abtuseness did not repel him, and though he was wounded when his song was not listened to, he kept on singing and was finally convinced that it was not in vain. These fine feelings are artistically expressed in the poem, *Kinori*, (My Harp), in which both tragedy and hope combine in harmony. He is so saturated with the message of hope that he calls himself "the messenger of redemption" and in another song, he expresses his love for his people by portraying very touchingly the bloom of the flowers on his grave, the leafy trees which will afford shade to a pair of lovers and to the weary wanderer, as symbols of his own heart in which love bloomed luxuriously.

No wonder then that when the Balfour Declaration was approved by the League of Nations in San Remo that he gave expression to his joy in a group of songs entitled, *Shirah Hadashah* (New Song), *ba-me-Zokiti* (Wherefore Did I Merit It), *Aharé ha-Besorah* (After the Message), in which the event is sung of in stately lines with glee and exultation. The determination of the Jew to stay in Palestine in spite of all obstacles is asserted with great vigor in two other songs, *Lo-Nozuz* (We Will Not Move) and *mi-Shiré ha-Olim* (From the Songs of Pioneers).

⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 7.

At times, however, when the gloom of the present arising from the apathy of the people and their disorganized life settles upon him, he turns, like Tschernichowski, to the distant past and sings the songs of the ancient heroes who fought mighty Rome, such as *mi-Shiré ha-Biryonim* (From the Songs of the Rebels), in which he gives free reign to his phantasy and portrays scenes of the mighty struggle of Jewish heroes for their land. The poems breathe strength and intense longing for redemption and freedom.

Cohen also felt the Jewish tragedy, and like Bialik, the inner phase more than the external, the disintegration of Jewish life, the rift between the older and the younger generations, the indifference to the fate of the people, and all resultant evils. He gave expression to his feelings, probably in unconscious imitation of Bialik in the form of prophetic utterances in the poems, *Hazon ha-Tishbi* (The Vision of the Tishbi, i.e. Elijah) and *Masa Dor* (The Burden of a Generation). In the first, Elijah, who is represented in the Bible as the zealot, and in the Talmud and popular legend as the harbinger of redemption, is the seer and speaker. The poet combined both phases in his Elijah. Through most of the poem which has also some prose parts, he assumes his first role as zealot, rebel, and chastiser of the wicked. There are exceptionally fine chapters in the poem which breathe of intense love for the people and possess deep pathos in the portrayal of the suffering of the Jews—it was written in 1906, a year of pogroms and revolution—their disintegrated life, division in their ranks, and the rush to escape Judaism on the part of the radical youth. These are followed towards the end by visions of an awakening spirit among the youth, their return to the people, the judgment of the nations for their sins toward Israel, and the birth of the Messiah. There is vigor in all of these visions but the poem as a whole, though thrilling, lacks harmony which the poet explains by the fact that it was written at intervals. It seems that Cohen overreached himself and that the canvas was too large for him.

The second is shorter and on the whole better executed. The prophetic tone is heard again, chastising, in the manner of Bialik, his unfortunate brethren. But in the last three chapters the tone changes from wrath to mercy and love. It must be admitted that this tone is more genuine with the poet, and as a result, that part of the poem is more stirring. In the concluding stanza, he expresses his wish to be like the pure mountain brook which winds its way quietly over rocks and pebbles reflecting brightly the rays of the sun and spreading on its

way blessing and life. We can say that this wish was to a great extent fulfilled in many of his poems.

Cohen also wrote a large number of short folk songs, ballads, and idylls. The themes are taken from stories and legends. There is much beauty in the short songs, and some of them possess charm, but lack the swing and fast rhythm of the popular song. Of his idylls and narrative poems, the best are *bi-Lail Hoshanah Rabah*, (In the Night of Hoshanah Raba) and *Perez and Naomi*. In the first we have an idyllic picture of a Jewish girl watching the stars on *Hoshanah Rabah* night waiting for the moment when the heavens will open to utter her wish.* In the second the idyllic life of a Jewish couple, Perez and Naomi, childless for more than ten years, is portrayed, and the final tragedy when the child arrives and the mother dies is touchingly pictured.

Our poet composed five poems of an epical nature entitled *Agadot Elohim* (Divine Legends). They deal with five episodes, past and future, in the history of the world and the Jews, which are: (a) creation; (b) the giving of the Law; (c) destruction of the Temple; (d) Messianic days; (e) resurrection. The themes allow him by the largeness of the canvas to give reign to his plastic genius and to portray selected scenes with beautiful colors and delicate tints. They are also permeated with a religious spirit and are among the best of his epic productions.

ii. Of a still more subdued tone and consequently of a different character is the poetry of Jacob Fichman, a versatile writer and a fine lyrical poet. Lyricism seems to be the fundamental quality of his poems, for though he wrote, as all singers of the time, nature and love poems, it is the expression of his personal feelings, of his reaction to the world and man which predominate all of his productions. He, therefore, excels little in plasticism and in general in objective description. The personal note is always cropping up, even in semit-historical narrative poems which are his best.

His lyric genius, however, is limited and circumscribed by the paucity of its expressions. Fichman does not reflect in his poems either the heights or depths of life, nor do the deep suffering, tragedy, and on the other hand, the hopes and aspirations of his people find voice in them

* There is a legend current among the Jews that on that night the heavens open for a second, and any wish uttered at that particular moment will be fulfilled. The difficulty is to single out the fleeting moment and utter the proper wish.

at least in those which were written before 1918, the year he arrived in Palestine. But even in his later poems, written in that country, of which a large number are included under an embracive title, *Yehudah* (Judea), it is primarily the love of the country and its beautiful spots hallowed by the glory of history, which find expression, and not the efforts of the people to rehabilitate that land and strike root in its ancient soil. The spirit of his lyrics is turned mainly inward towards his own soul in its reflection upon his individual life.

The most elemental trait of that spirit is a certain wistfulness which dominates all the moods of the singer and even forms a part of the content of his life. In one of his early poems entitled *Yogeni* (My Sorrow), the poet expresses himself as finding comfort in the quiet sorrow of the spirit which fills his heart in trying moments of his life. In dark nights, when he feels forsaken of friends, it is the melody of this tune of the soul which buoys him up. Nowhere does he reveal to us the reason for this wistfulness. He merely asserts in another poem that it is not the suffering of his people which nursed in him that mood, but that he drew it from the stillness and quiet of his own life.⁶⁸ This mood is permanent with him, for our poet is very impressionable and impressions once made upon his soul remain with him for life as he sings:

Dreams do not die
If they bloomed once in the soul;
They accompany man; later
When they fade, their echo is heard for many days⁶⁹

It is these accumulated impressions of the past which become rarified and more ethereal the further a man is removed from them, which engender in Fichman the wistful mood, the constant longing for love, for rest, and romanticism. Consequently, longing, aspiring, dreaming of the happy moments of the past or of an indefinite future are the dominant motives of his lyrics. The large city with its tumult and noisy life does not arouse in him a passion and a storm of emotions but a feeling of loneliness, and a yearning for friendship to protect him from the mysterious hunger of human desires. In a cycle of lyric poems called *Rinat Drakim* (Song of Ways), he sings of his efforts to drown his sorrow by roaming at large in the world, by satiating his eye with ever new beauty of nature, but in vain. In spite of his assur-

⁶⁸ Collected Poems, Vol. II, p. 44.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

ing himself that wandering is his second nature, he longs for rest.

This wistfulness is not pessimism, for our poet does not look upon life as essentially evil. Nay, he knows its lights, and as noted, even longs for them, but he knows also its shadows. As such his sorrow is not unmixed with joy as he says, "The edges of the shadows are gilded with light." At times he makes an effort to sing of the joy he finds in life every day, comparing himself to the sail of a boat which waves carelessly in the wind. To him likewise, "every day is a song which brings myriads of comforts." The same motive is expressed in *Shir ha-Hélek* (The Song of the Wanderer), where he chants of his carefree mood, of his pleasure derived from every blooming flower, or sun-drenched field, or the beauty of a passing girl. But this joy is only apparent. Underneath there reigns in his soul the feeling of wistfulness. His sorrow, though, rests on him lightly; it does not stir nor vex his soul, nor does it arouse a feeling of animosity towards any one. On the contrary, it engenders sympathy and kindness. The evil of the world arouses in him only shame and tears. He confesses freely in the poem *Mitok ha-Arafel* (Out of Darkness) that his Muse cannot curse, nor pour wrath on man or nation. That probably explains his silence in times of Jewish suffering, for any expression of this tragedy would have required wrath and anger, emotions unknown to our poet.

The same traits mark also his nature poems. The notes of quiet and pensiveness are dominant. There is no description of nature in its full bloom, of its radiance of colors and play of tints, but of its beauty in a state of repose. Hence he is attracted by the quiet of the night which he portrays skilfully, and similarly he sings more of the fall than the summer. It is the charm of the dying beauty of nature which appears with the departing summer and the beginning of the fall which captivates him. The fall also serves him as a motive for numerous poems. He sings masterfully of the last glory which is shed upon the world in early fall before the rainy and stormy days arrive. However, this approach of the end of summer does not arouse any vexation nor mourning in the soul of the poet, for on the contrary in one of his poems, *Elul*, we are told that the nakedness of the fields in fall arouses in him a sense of trust and even of joy. He feels elated on coming in contact with the world in its primitive unadorned form.

Still this joy is only temporary, the wistfulness persists, and hence his eventide poem *Ruah Ereb* (Evening Breeze), which charms us with its lyrical note, especially when he sings of the evening breeze

which brings both rest and repose as well as a longing for distances unknown. In general, the lyrical and personal note is so dominant in his nature poems that at times we are perplexed at their very character and are unable to determine the fundamental tone. There is little objective description in these poems, but the echo of the poet's relation to nature, which is attuned to his different moods, is heard in them.

This combination of the lyrical spirit with the love for the beauty of nature found its best expression in the cycle of Palestinian poems entitled *Yehudah* (Judea). Here, the poet is at his best. The lyrical note expressed in the historical memories attached to every place in Palestine harmonizes beautifully with the peaceful scenes and the quiet beauty of the spots which the poet chose to sing about. Such poems as *Nahal Shorek* (The Brook of Shorek), *Yeriho* (Jericho), *Keburat Raḥel* (The Tomb of Rachel), *Lailah be-Shefelah* (A Night in the Coastal Plain), *Yam Yafo be-Lailah* (The Sea At Jaffe at Night) portray nature in its Oriental coloring; they are tinged with melodies of a distant past, and are permeated with a spirit of love for the land and its glories. Fichman is endowed with an ability to portray events, phenomena, and scenes in such a setting in which nature only acts as the contributing factor to the beauty of the event or the episode itself. His group of poems, *Yerushalayyim* (Jerusalem) is of this character. Here Jerusalem, as it appears in different moments, in moonlight, in storm, in the heat of noon or in a moment when the church bells ring is exquisitely portrayed in fine miniatures. The poem, *Nebo*, describing the burial place of Moses at sunset is a masterful lyric in a setting of nature. In a few stanzas the poet conveys to us the character of the leader as he conceives it, thus:

I will plead no more
For grace and meager kindness,
With the generation I redeemed shall my grave be
In the recess of the mountain and its silence.⁷⁰

His love poems display similar characteristics. They seldom breathe of passion and of strong desire to be near the beloved, nor do they describe her beauty and charms. He sings primarily of past love and of the happiness which was his. There is the same wistful note, the longing for what was gone, never to return. Our poet, however, is thankful for past happiness, and true to his belief that beautiful dreams

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

never die, he sings to his beloved of yore and tells her that he treasures the glance of affection in her eyes and that it was her love that saved him from despair in many gloomy days. Only once does he express himself in a more passionate manner, in the poem *Yemé Shemesh* (Sunny Days), in which he gives rein to his emotions with a vigor unknown in his other songs. On the whole, his love poems are marked by a tenderness which emanates from a deep feeling soul soothing the troubled heart rather than stirring it.

Fichman, as noted, did not give utterance in his shorter poems either to the Jewish tragedy or to the hopes of his people. But these feelings had to find expression, and accordingly he chose a form most adaptable to his lyrical Muse. He wrote a number of long Biblical poems where he dramatized certain episodes in the life of Scriptural personages. He chose not the heroic moments in their lives but the more human and tender phases. Such are *Ruth*, *Ebel David* (The Sorrow of David), *Ioab* (Joab), and *Shimshon be-Gazah* (Samson in Gaza).

In the first, which is based on the Biblical idyll of the Book of Ruth, he portrays the three principal characters of that drama. The first chapter is devoted to Naomi, her tragic return to Bethlehem, the place of her former glory, and her tenderness and love for her adopted daughter, Ruth. With a fine woman's intuition she detects in the eyes of her daughter-in-law, since she follows the reapers in the fields of Boaz, a new light, and divines its meaning as the awakening of a new life. She talks to Ruth and hints at ultimate separation. Ruth replies that her love for Naomi is greater than that for any man. Naomi, however, warns her of the slumbering passion in her soul and advises marriage to Boaz. The subject of the second chapter is Boaz, and in lyrical stanzas the awakening love of the man for the strange and unknown Moabite maiden is depicted. It is not the physical beauty which attracts him but the nobility of her character, the quiet sorrow reflected in her eyes, nay, her very shrinking from his gaze. In the third chapter Ruth's coming to Boaz at night is the theme. Her feelings during that slow walk to the tent of the man she loves are masterfully portrayed. Her whole past rises before her, her love for and happy life with her former husband, Kilyon, are vivified. Her past still lives with her, yet the light of the future dawns within her soul; a new love is sprouting in her heart. There is really no struggle but a kind of peaceful compromise between the past and future. There is much human

feeling in that poem which, though it possesses few original thoughts, brings out the hidden beauty in the idyll of the Book of Ruth.

In the *Ebel David*, the theme is taken from a Jewish legend which tells that King David was melancholy for twenty years after his illicit love with Bat Sheba. During these years his former inspiration and his Muse departed. The poet portrays with skill the longing of the king for his former innocent state, for the moments of ecstasy. David accepted misfortune and the evils which befell him with equanimity, but the bareness of spirit, the emptiness of soul he cannot tolerate, and the burning pain is expressed with poetic penetration. There is also a deep religious spirit pervading the poem. In *Joab*, the motive is the return of the inspiration to David, who once more plays his harp and expresses his innermost feelings to God in joyful song. The tones of the harp gladden the entire household and even the hardy warrior, Joab, is touched by them. But his stormy spirit cannot be restrained, and he calls to David to heed the blares of the trumpets of war which is the task facing him at the moment and leave the sweet praise of God to the coming generation who will enjoy the fruits of conquest in peace, and the playing ceases.

In *Samson in Gaza*, the Biblical episode of Samson's stay in Gaza, the Philistine city, and his curt departure in the middle of the night when his enemies thought him trapped, is the theme. It is given a new content and supplied with a lyrical motive. Samson is struggling against his attraction for the Philistine civilization of the lowlands which possesses beauty, charm, and richness, as compared with the ruggedness, bareness, and drabness of the life of his brethren, the hill-dwellers. The attraction is enhanced by his infatuation for a pretty Philistine daughter. For a moment he succumbs, but the call of his people proves the stronger of the two forces, and he leaves the city of the enemy with all its charms in the middle of the night. There are some fine passages in the poem, especially those revealing the psychology of a woman's love, but the character of Samson is not fully drawn and the struggle in his heart between the two opposing forces is not portrayed in complete relief.

Fichman was the first of the younger poets to return to the Bible for poetic motives, and he succeeded to a large degree in breathing the spirit of ancient times into his productions, though not entirely, for often there is disharmony between the note of modernity and the life of the distant past.

iii. Wistfulness and a strain of pessimism seem to be characteristic of the younger Hebrew poets and accordingly form also important traits in the poetry of David Shimonowitz, another leading bard of our time, except that they are expressed in a more vigorous manner and with greater charm and intensity. These traits, however, only reflect one phase of Shimonowitz's poetic genius, for he is a versatile singer and excels in many types of poetry, expressing both the feelings of his own soul and the hopes and national aspirations of his people. In fact two personalities dwell in his soul which hardly resemble each other, the individual and the national. The former is laden with a spirit of sorrow arising from a pessimistic view of life, due to the inability of man to fathom its mysteries, while the latter is, on the whole, hopeful, light, and cheerful, and there is little trace in it of the earnestness and gravity of the former. The difference between the two types of poetic productions is also reflected in their form and motive; the individual type is primarily lyrical dealing with the various moods of the poet's reaction to life and nature, while the national is mainly narrative and descriptive, portraying the new life in Palestine, and with one exception, does not touch upon the deeper and graver phase of the national restoration or upon the tragedy of Jewish suffering.

These apparently two distinct phases of Shimonowitz's poetry have after all a common underlying substratum which becomes evident after a more penetrating glance into the nature and character of his lyrics. In one of his shorter poems, our singer reveals to us the more sombre and earnest character of his Muse saying that he does not sing for those for whom life is restful and permeated with a spirit of peace, but for those who, stirred by the sight of the abyss of life, clutch at fleeting light rays to save themselves from despair.⁷¹ In other poems we hear the echo of the struggle going on in his soul, for he longs to sing of joy and beauty, but on discovering the emptiness of life, his poetic sun sets and only single rays light the darkness. As a result, these rays at times disperse the gloom of pessimism dominating many of his lyrics, but not completely; and he sings of light or of melodies which in the stillness of the eventide awaken in him sweet dreams or bring him messages from a mysterious world.⁷²

In a number of poems he reveals to us the secret of his pessimism. It arises from a serious attitude towards life. He is not satisfied with tak-

⁷¹ Collected Poems, Vol. I, p. 49.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 5, 9.

ing each moment as it comes and enjoy it to its full, but wants to delve into the very secrets of existence. Searching either for the beginning or the end of the magic chain which binds together distance and time, he grasps link after link, speedily exchanging one for the other.⁷³ He is, however, unable to reach his goal and consequently is depressed as he tells us in one of his poems, *ba-Ma'gal* (In the Circle), by the feeling that all searching is in vain. We move in a circle and come back to the point we start from. He knows there are many who tread the same circle, but he exclaims:

They do not touch the circle's rim
For stunted are they all.
They move in tranquil ease because
They are puny and they are small,
While I in anguish press myself against the wall.⁷⁴

Our poet, as many before him, had a glimpse beyond the veil spread over life and is, therefore, burdened with a great sorrow for which he attempted to find a cure in wandering, pursuing new scenes, but in vain. He carries that sorrow with him always and even the beauty of spring does not disperse it. In such moments he bewails, in one of his poems, *Lo Eẓim Anahnu* (We are Not Trees), the inability of man to rejuvenate himself and bloom again as the tree does. He mournfully repeats the old complaint of Job⁷⁵ and dolefully chants, "We are not like a tree but like leaves, leaves that are torn by the wind and left to decay." Yet, he struggles valiantly against despair and at certain times his feelings of optimism revolt against depression, wistfulness and sorrow. Such a state of revolt is portrayed by him in his poem, *Mered* (Rebellion), in which we hear the echo of the triumph of hope and joy, and aspiration which crept into his soul unawares and finally broke forth in full force. The poet welcomes them and urges them to master his lyre and sing the song of the future. Thus Shimonowitz sings his lyrics in the shadow of a great sorrow, startling us by the revelation of the abyss of life, but from time to time also cheers us with notes of optimism.

Lyricism is a dominant note in Shimonowitz's poetry, and consequently there is no fast line separating his nature poems and the lyrics proper. The same wistfulness and pessimism permeates the former.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

⁷⁵ Job, XIV, 8, 9.

He sings charmingly of the twilight, eventide, and the fall; but all these phenomena awaken in him an indefinable sorrow. Even the spring, the delight of poets, does not banish it, for he thinks of the passing of beauty. Winter with its storms, though, does not depress him but arouses in him a spirit of strife and a desire to conquer obstacles.

However, lyricism is only one phase of his nature poems, for Shimonowitz is also a master of description and a number of his portrayals of nature are distinguished by their beauty of color and tint. He is especially skilful in depicting nature in moments of peace, such as the world at dawn when it stands still as if waiting for some event to take place, or as the poet says, in *Lifné Alot ha-Shahar* (Before Dawn) "All expect redemption." This tendency to animate nature is displayed by him in several poems, one of which, *ha-Yar Roesh* (The Forest Hums), runs as follows:

The woods are atremble—the tree-tops are stirred
They long to take flight to the vault of the sky.
The rivers in torrent are furiously spurred
And wave after wave leaps joyously high.
On the face of the heavens the storm-clouds are tossed
They swoop here and there without reason or rhyme,
As though all the world is athirst to be lost
In the breast of another world calm and sublime.⁷⁶

His power of description is climaxed in a cycle of poems entitled *Yeshimon* (The Desert). In it he portrays the majesty and silence of the desert at three different moments, noon, sunset, and night in beautiful and vigorous stanzas. The lyrical and reflective strains are not absent even here, for his ear catches the note of sorrow in the silence of the desert at noon interpreting it as the mourning of light at pouring its splendor infinitely and without purpose on barren rocks.

Shimonowitz's lyric Muse is mainly individual, but he is not altogether insensible to the suffering of fellow-man and the great World War did not pass unnoticed by him. In a cycle of poems, *Milhamah* (War), he expresses the depth of that tragedy in several scenes which are very touching both in their grim pathos and bitter satire as when calling the withered bones of the slain, strewn on the battlefields "mementos of brotherhood among nations." Yet the generally pessimistic poet is not disheartened and concludes his cycle with the hope that

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 307.

Children will atone for the deeds of the fathers
And love will sprout out of the seed of pain.⁷⁷

His love poems are few, and speak more of the longing for love rather than describing its charms and strength. Several of them, though, are saturated with passion which serves him as an escape from the burden of his sorrow. However, a number of fine love songs are included in the cycle of his lyrical poems.

The spark of hope which always animated our poet even in his gloomy lyrical mood was slowly increasing in strength and volume until it became a bright flame, radiating both light and warmth when the singer came in contact with the new life in Palestine. Shimonowitz thus became a national poet, but only national to the degree that he sings and portrays the life of the pioneers, their struggles, their woes, and joys. The national movement itself, the strivings for the realization of that ideal, the dream of an ancient people, all these hardly find voice in his poems, and in his cycle, *mi-Shiré ha-Hurban* (Songs of Destruction), his pessimistic strain reappears. He speaks in measured verses of the spiritual dryness of the people, pleads passionately for the appearance of the Messiah, expressing impatience at his tarrying. The concluding poem of the cycle, though, reveals a change in the poet's mood. He tells us that while his soul still drinks the cup of sorrow, it quaffs along with it, also of the cup of hope. Hope ultimately triumphed when the poet came in touch with reality, with the new life which was slowly rising through toil and the sacrifice of the young pioneers who streamed into Palestine from many lands of the Diaspora in the first years after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. Thus, it is the same poet who always sang about his sorrow who wrote, after the Arab attack on the Jews in 1921, two beautiful and most vigorous poems *'Al Sfod* (No Mourning) and *Lo Shannanim we-Hagigiyyim* (Not Peaceful nor Festive) which are permeated with a spirit of courage, of hope for the success of the restoration, and of determination of the will to complete the work begun. The first of the songs is distinguished by its style, each line consisting only of two words, and has both a martial swing and rhythm ending thus:

Mourn not,
Weep not
At a time like this;

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 327.

Nor bow your head
 Work! Work!
 Ploughman, plow!
 Sower, sow your seed!
 In an evil moment
 Redouble your effort
 Redouble your toil
 Plant and dig!
 Clear and fence!
 Level and cast up
 The highway of freedom
 Toward a day of light.
 The path of affliction
 Marks the road of redemption
 And the bondsman's blood
 Cries out to the soul of the people
 "Be aroused and labor!
 Be redeemed and redeem!"⁷⁸

The greatest contribution of our poet to national Hebrew poetry are his *Idiliyot* (Idylls), nine long descriptive and semi-narrative poems portraying new Palestinian life. The subjects are various; two, *Yardenit* and *Karmit* have love as their motive and portray love affairs one of which took place in Galilee, and the other in the vineyards of Judea between the watchmen and the daughters of the colonists. *ba-Ya'ar be-Hederah* (The Hederah Forest) depicts a day in the life of the workers in the National Fund Eucalyptus Forest; *Yobel ha-Eglonim* (The Jubilee of the Drivers) relates an episode in the life of the *Haluzim*, an evening celebration in their tent colony, a joyous occasion, because fifty of them became drivers in the Jewish colonies and took the place of the Arabs. *ha-Yore* (Early Rain) and *Leket* (Gleanings) are delightful tales of the life of the Yemenite Jews and *ha-Derek* is a story of the journey of old and young Jews to Palestine, each group having its own purpose, the first to spend their last days in the shadow of the Wailing Wall and the second to spend the strength of their muscles and the exuberant energy of their spirit in the rebuilding of the desolate land.

The Idylls abound in beautiful description of Palestinian nature depicting the colors of the landscape, the flower-covered fields, the stately palms and eucalyptus trees, and the fruit-laden vines, as well as the moving animal life. But of greater charm is the peaceful picture

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 343.

of human life described and portrayed masterfully. The idylls breathe the spirit of idealism which animated the pioneers in their hard task of turning a lone desolate land into flourishing fields and gardens, and are enlivened by the sympathy and love of the poet for the land and people. In the Yemenite idylls as well as in the poem, *ba-Derek*, legends and sagas of old are intertwined with the descriptions and narratives so dexterously that the past and present merge into an harmonious picture.

Shimonowitz wrote also a number of poems called *mi-Agadat Zefat* (Legends of Sefad), in which legends of the sixteenth century Safed serve as motives. Our poet succeeded in catching the mystic air of that ancient Kabbalistic community, the passionate longing for redemption and the Messiah which animated these savants, and preserved them in poetic productions. Thus Shimonowitz, in his idylls, surrounded the new life of Palestine with a poetic halo which makes us see its inner light through its drab exterior.

32. THE YOUNGER PALESTINIAN POETS

The poets hitherto discussed, though much of their poetry was composed after the War and in Palestine, cannot be classed as Palestinian, nor do they represent the somewhat inexplicable spirit of post-War Jewry. They all began their careers in pre-War Russian Jewry, and though they experienced the vicissitudes of war and also saw the rise of the new pioneer life in Palestine, yet their poetic genius which assumed a definite character in a more static period of life was little affected by all these changes and they continued to tread the beaten paths of traditional poetry. It is different with the younger poets. They came to manhood during the stormy days of the War and lived through its terrors bearing all the suffering it entailed, especially to the Jews. One of them even participated in the War as an officer in the Austrian army. Their souls became the battle-ground of many contrary ideas and ideals. With the end of the War they were tossed by currents over which they had no control into a half-desolate Palestine, just beginning to be rehabilitated by swarms of pioneers, who were as emotionally unstable and as spiritually confused as themselves. The transformation which took place in the life of these young people who were formerly students, propagandists, followers of various occupations and devotees of diverse ideals and now turned into hard-working laborers, builders, and rehabilitators of a waste

land, attracted the impressionable souls of the would-be poets and struck new chords in their hearts. This new life, however, with its apparent buoyancy and glamor of idealism was not strong enough to eradicate the old impressions of terror, sorrow, and confusion of ideas which formed solidified strata in their souls. And when they began to sing, to give expression to their feelings, they did it in a peculiar manner, indicative of confused emotions, of an indifferent reaction to the world and life, both general and Jewish, of an effort to grasp at something which was not even clear to themselves. The general characteristics of this type of poetry are: first, that it is primarily lyrical, for, while the poets are not unaware of the beauties of nature and often describe it in fine colors, nature as such occupies no important place in their songs and is only an incident in their moods. Second, it is dominated by a spirit of sorrow and suffering; hope is not unknown to these young singers but is expressed in a vague manner. Third, the individualistic tone is outstanding even in their national poems; it is the ego of the poet which speaks, and at times, shouts at the nation, rather than the spirit of the nation speaking through him. Fourth, due partly to emotional excess and partly to the influence of Russian literature and to the experiences of their former life, there is a certain nakedness of soul in this type of poetry. No attempt at restraint, no effort at beauty, at harmony and proportion, but verses are indited indiscriminately, and thoughts and emotions which should rather remain hidden, are expressed.

As a result of these characteristics, there is also little beauty of form. Symbolism abounds, blank verse is frequently employed, prose passages are numerous, and little effort is spent in the choice of words. Consequently, the poems of these younger singers bristle with barbaric constructions, abbreviations, and foreign words as well as with expressions which good taste eschews.

It is, of course, understood that all these traits and characteristics are not expressed in equal measure by each and every one of these poets, but vary with the individual; one expresses them in a larger degree, another, in a lesser. All of them, however, are permeated with restlessness, impetuosity of spirit, and wistfulness which, at times, assume an abnormal aspect. Yet with all this, there is strength and vigor in some poems, flashes of thought and a spirit of genuine emotion in others, and a yearning, though indefinite and frequently even inarticulate—all these have a strong appeal.

i. The poet who typifies these characteristics in extreme degree is Abraham Shlonsky. Born in the Crimea and having lived through the horrors of war in Ukraine, he finally migrated to Palestine and began to sing. His song bears all the earmarks of a restless soul laden with sorrow which labors hard to express its feelings, and whose emotions are more of the character of sparks than of a glowing fire. In general, his poems are divided into two classes, those that deal with life in general and those which portray his reaction to life in Palestine. The first are primarily lyrical and are permeated with a spirit of sorrow and a pessimistic outlook upon life. His motives are the monotony of life, its purposelessness, and blind destiny. He seems to be overwhelmed by the burden of existence which he calls, in one of his poems *'Al ha-Saf*, symbolically a threshold, but one which leads to no palace or resting place. In other poems, he expresses very pathetically, though incoherently and disjointedly his forlorn state in the world, the result of the experiences of the Jewish youth during and after the War. He is without faith in a God or in ideals. It is not his fault but that of the times as he expresses himself, "A waif of the generation without prayer or God," a kind of spiritual hobo who is indifferent to events and vicissitudes. Still, he does not accept his fate without struggle. On the contrary, he would like to regain his faith, his childish innocence, and in one of his poems, *be-Zel Shadai* (In the Shadow of God), we have a touching portrayal of his childhood when the world and life radiated light. However, that state has gone forever; his past which he symbolically calls the hump on his back weighs him down. Thus he writes lyric after lyric where these motives are repeated in various forms.

Shlonsky was greatly influenced by the Russian impressionistic-futuristic school of poetry, and his poems often sound like a jumble of verses with little connection between them. However, individual stanzas at times display strong colors and flashes of thought. He has not written special nature poems but his lyrics are interspersed with exquisite miniature pictures of nature which he personifies and endows with human traits. Sunset and eventide are portrayed by him as a banquet at which evening raises its cup with a red hand and pours the wine of beauty to the blue of heaven, while the twinkling stars fly like fireflies to the sky. When the banquet is over, night falls; the breezes, the servants, come out to sweep the empty hall. Very frequently, he introduces a Jewish note in his nature poems. Fall is to

him *Isru Hag* (Day After the Holiday); the trees, like the *Lulab* after *Succoth*, disheveled, and the world, like a Succah, after the Feast of Tabernacles, the wind tearing down its cover of branches and grass.

In the cycle of Palestinian poems entitled *Gilboa*, the same traits are in evidence. There is an incoherent expression of love for the soil, for work, for the simple life of the farmer, the shepherd, for the sheep cows, and all that goes with the rehabilitation of the land. At times, the excessive emotionalism is repellent, for the poet has no restraint and expresses his feelings in a very primitive form. Yet, some of his poems have charm and beauty, such as the shorter cycle *Adamah* (Earth), in which he dramatizes moments in nature, such as the heat at noon, rain, and storm, and endows the world with human qualities and traits, and the whole picture assumes vividness and life. There is no lack of symbolism also in these poems, and in *Asif* (Ingathering), it is particularly abundant. Here, our young poet attempts to symbolize life in agricultural terms. Life is a mill, striving is the miller, and experience is the flour, and with his peculiar nonchalance he concedes that it does not matter whether it is fine flour or coarse as long as the mill grinds.

There is no doubt that Shlonsky is possessed of poetic penetration into life, but on the whole, his poetry is wrapped in a mist of indefiniteness and a painful striving to express some thing which is not clear to himself. When the mist clears at times, a strange beauty is revealed to us, illuminated by flashes of light of a peculiar color.

ii. Avigdor ha-Meiri (Feuerstein) is another young poet, who typifies some of the traits described above but in a much lesser degree. His Muse is restless, to be sure, but his restlessness does not arise from confusion, but from a tragic conflict of emotions in his soul. Sorrow and pain dominate his songs, but the clouds hovering over his soul have often a silver lining and hope for himself and his people forms an important element in his poetry. He is individualistic but is simultaneously permeated with a deep love for his people and its traditions which he expresses with great enthusiasm, though his national poems are marked by a strong personal note. His emotionalism is excessive and at times oversteps the bounds of proportion and harmony, but it does not disrupt the unity of his songs; his sentiments are expressed with impetuosity but not in a disjointed manner. As a result, Meiri's poetry possesses strength, vigor, as well as tenderness tinged with spiritual beauty emanating from a loving and sorrow-laden heart.

From all that has been said, it may be inferred that the fundamental trait of Meiri's poetry is lyricism. There are hardly any nature poems among his productions nor many descriptions of nature in his lyrics. He wrote few love songs. He is primarily a poet of life, and especially the life of the modern Jew whose soul is torn between East and West. In fact, he speaks of himself in his poem, *Sheté Neshomot* (Two Souls), as a man who possesses two souls, one which dwells on the rivers of the East, striving for peace, and one which has its abode on the rivers of the West dreaming of strife. It is the tragedy of a dualism of several phases within his soul, of which Meiri sings and which colors his poetry. There is first the conflict between man and the Jew in him for the heart of our bard embraces all humanity, and the suffering of all men finds an echo in his soul as he says of himself in one of his poems *ha-Menashek Lebobot* (Kiss of Hearts), "I embrace the soul of all souls and kiss all hearts." Yet he feels especially the suffering of the Jew whose fate is so tragic, nay, he is even saturated with his pain. This conflict alone is sufficient to disturb his spirit, but there is still another one that is the strife between his Jewish self saturated with tradition and the lore of ages, and permeated with an ethical and earnest outlook upon life and the soul of the European within him which views life differently. He pictures vividly the strife going on in his heart on a beautiful spring evening. "All around," says he, in *be-Ereb Abib Neḳar* (On a Spring Eve in a Strange Land), "there is laughter, love, and a vapor of sin envelops the earth." His heart is intoxicated with beauty and desire, but a still voice whispers to him to shun them and escape.

These and other conflicts are due partly to his past experiences. Meiri was born and raised in Hungary, in a home where the pure Jewish atmosphere was all prevailing. In his youth, however, he had plunged into the general European life and its culture in a great measure. During the War, he served, as mentioned, as an officer in the Austrian army and saw its horrors. He was taken captive by the Russians, was sent to a Siberian prison camp and experienced the agonies of hell. On his release, he settled in Palestine and there he was impressed by the scene of rehabilitation. All these affected his sensitive soul, aggravated the conflicts within it and gave rise to a whole complex of new ones. And when he began to sing, the chorus of discordant emotions clamoring for expression burst out with vehemence. Consequently, we have a great variety in his lyric motives. At times, the motive is love for his mother, and in his poem, *Haleb Imi*

ha-Shor (The Song of My Mother's Milk), we have a charming portrayal of a Jewish woman who instilled in the blood of her son both the virus of Jewish suffering and the hope of redemption and the love of Zion. In another, *Tefillah* (A Prayer), we are touched by the deep pathos of the conflict of Jew and man. The poet portrays his feelings at his entrance in the War. He asks his God whither does he send him. He, to whom peace is life, whose heart echoes the pain of all sufferers, is sent to kill and murder. He asks how can he draw the sword and be at peace with the Jew in him?

The more frequent motive, however, is the tragic conflict between the pain and sorrow of his heart and the desire for hope, rest, and peace of soul. This conflict is portrayed by our poet in a pathetic and stirring manner in his dramatic poem, *Shirat ha-Harim* (The Song of the Mountains), in which he hears in fantasy the song of two Palestinian mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, which symbolize goodness, hope, and blessing, on the one hand, and wrath, evil, and pain on the other hand—according to Deuteronomy XXVII, 12, 13, Gerizim was the mountain on which the blessings were pronounced and Ebal the one on which curses were uttered. Both mountains sing to the poet; the first encourages him and welcomes him to Palestine promising rest and hope; the second threatens him with pain and sorrow and urges him to continue with his song of wrath and bitterness. There is pathos and tragedy in this poem of a soul torn between grim reality and a striving for a better future. In the expression by the poet of his struggle to liberate himself of the load of sorrow which oppresses him there is a strong religious note, for though at times he calls himself an atheist or agnostic, the faith inculcated in him by his mother asserts itself often, and we find more prayers among the poems of our singer than among those of any other modern Hebrew poet. In one of them, *ba-Mebukah ha-Gedolah* (In the Great Confusion), written during the War, he, overcome by the suffering of the world, pleads to God to take away his light, his very soul, so that he should not see a world in the throes of agony. In another, *Yehi Razon* (May the Will be Realized), he pleads pathetically for inspiration, for a happy spirit, but this plea is also tinged with a modicum of sorrow. Our poet never disparages sorrow; on the contrary, he often calls it a blessing, for it is this sense which makes man love his fellow-man and participate in his burden. It is the stinging dull pain and suffering which oppress him.

Among our poet's lyrics there are a number stamped by the impress

of war which are distinguished by a sombre light revealing the full horror of that phenomenon in the life of nations. One is particularly vigorous and keen in its irony. It is called *Idilyat ha-Satan* (The Idyll of Satan). It portrays a field between trenches on a beautiful summer day. The sun is shining, flowers are blooming, and all is apparently peaceful and loving, but here and there he sees carcasses staring in the sun. All is quiet except for the humming of a bee which alights on a flower, and while sucking its nectar, it also sucks drops of human blood spattered on its leaves.

The same dualism of sorrow and hope, suffering of the Jews and visions of a better future runs through Meiri's numerous national poems. All of them, however, are permeated with a tender love for his brethren. He does not rise above them and reproach them from the heights for their indifference to their fate as many contemporary Hebrew poets do, but is ever among them, sharing their suffering, comforting them in their agony. Even when he assumes a prophetic tone, no words of wrath fall from his lips but assurance of his dedication to the cause of redemption and his verses breathe confidence of ultimate success. Thus, in the poem *Kehunoti* (My Mission), he speaks in prophetic tones to his people that he dedicates his life to the abolition of despair from their hearts, to the destruction of the altars of strange gods, and to the banishment of false prophets. Instead he will bring to them the light of the God of Israel, and in the voice from Sinai sing to them the song of the future. To the realization of this mission, he proclaims, he shall devote all his days, for he says, "I will sanctify the name of our God by my life and not by my death." In another poem, he calls to his brethren to open their eyes, to saturate their hearts with the spirit of the renaissance, to return out of the darkness of the exile to the light from Sinai and also to the beauties of nature which proclaim the glory of God. He pleads with them in the name of the God of Grace to dream of a bright future. At times as in *Galut ha-Shekinah*, he chants mournfully before the *Shekinah* and asks her whether his people will ever arise and whether better days will ever come? He reads the answer in her eye. "Leave my children alone, for they sleep soundly."

His enthusiasm for the work of rehabilitation of Palestine is expressed in many poems of which the *Shirat ha-Kebish* (The Song of the Road) is the most thrilling. It is an ode to the pioneers, the builders of a new life, and is permeated with joy. His love for his people echoes through

numerous songs, but the short poem, *Al-Tenashkîni* (Do Not Kiss Me), sums it up in its full warmth. It runs as follows:

I have a mother in the grave—
 Sarah is her name,
 And of her hallowed lips, the kiss
 Burns in my mouth like a flame.
 Do not kiss me—wretched waif that I am,
 For holy am I!

I have a clime where legends grow
 Traditions old and rare
 The East, the South, the North, the West—
 They flourish everywhere.
 Do not kiss me— orphaned now; for there
 They wait for me.

I have a people most forlorn,
 But holy are they too,
 Who suffer and yet dream—who gasp
 Yet sing their song anew.
 Do not kiss me, then, lest if you do
 I die before my time.⁷⁹

iii. Greatly different in character and tempo is the poetry of Uri Zebi Greenberg, the third Palestinian poet. With the exception of the impetuosity and the unrestrained manner of expression, there is little resemblance between him and that of the other members of the group. There is no confusion in his poetic outbursts. He is quite clear in his emotions; there is no indefinite longing and grasping at ethereal visions in his songs, but an explicit aim and goal. There is no tenderness and sorrow in his soul, but burning pain and raging wrath. In fact, our bard constitutes a unique phenomenon in Hebrew poetry, for he is possessed only of one emotion—love for his people. There is only one motive in all his poems, or rather one of two phases, Jewish suffering and Jewish rehabilitation in the ancient land. All else does not matter; nature has no charm for him nor love any attraction. He is individualistic and his ego is written in red letters all over his poems, but it is all wrapped up in the fate of his nation. Like the prophets of old, with whom he claims kinship quite frankly, especially with Jeremiah, he is possessed of one burden; unlike them, he speaks more in his own name rather than in the name of God though there is a religious note

⁷⁹ Collected poems, p. 418.

in his poems. Coming to Palestine from Galicia in 1923, his fiery soul, embittered by the suffering in the Diaspora and seared with pain at the tragedy of his people, was caught by the scene of rehabilitation and the vision of glory of a real Jewish state—he often speaks of a kingdom and calls himself poet of royalty—flitted before his eyes. When the attacks upon the Jews in 1929, with the consequent results of political scheming against and limitation of the national aspirations to a homeland, took place, the soul of the young enthusiast was shocked to its depth. He, however, did not despair but continued to clamor for the realization of his great ideal, and to chastise those he thinks responsible for the apparently lost dream. In fact, he does not chant but shouts, does not chastise but hurls invectives and curses on those who compromise with the ruling powers; he does not weep but sobs; and in bewailing the fate of his people he pens dirges and writhes in pain. There are no notes in a minor key in his songs, but all in a major key and at the highest pitch. There is no attempt at beauty of verses and choice of expression and there are many prose passages in his poems, but there is a vigor underlying them, for the feeling is genuine, even if unnecessarily magnified.

The nature of Greenberg's poetry, which resembles at times molten lava thrown out of a volcano in stormy moments, does not admit of a characterization nor of an analysis except in a special study. It can be traced only in its general lines and tendencies. As such, the poems fall into three classes: those in which Jewish suffering, both in the Diaspora and in Palestine, is the motive; those which chant a mournful dirge over the fading of the grand dream; and those wherein prophet-like he chastises and satirizes the indifference of the Jews, the spirit of compromise of the national leaders, and the general apathy to the fate of Israel and the destiny of Palestine. The last can really be denominated Hebrew Philippics in verse, for there is a strong political strain in them.

Vigor is the fundamental trait of the first class of these poems. There is no beauty nor proportion, for they breathe pain and rage. With almost painful detail and prosaic simplicity, the poet portrays in one of his poems, *mi-Ma'makim*, Jewish martyrdom in the Ukraine and other lands during the War and after it, in strong colors. He is astounded how such suffering and torture could be so easily forgotten by the masses and how they could follow the regular course of life. He proclaims proudly that he alone is the recorder of the tragedy which he bears in his soul. The same tragedy is portrayed in still more gruesome

colors, louder in his cry of pain at the calm after the storm in the poem, *Kehilot ha-Kodesh be-Golah* (Holy Communities of the Exile). His ego is evident all through the poem, for he asserts that he is the one who bears in his heart the accumulated pain of generations. In *Galut* (Exile), the Jewish situation in Poland and Soviet Russia, the poverty, despair, and the feeling of dull pain at the inevitable fate are depicted in the darkest colors, but there is also a note of hope. The pioneers who leave for Palestine in tattered clothes but with a light in their eyes cheer his heart and he breaks out in a song of hope that the Messiah will ultimately come, not a shadowy one in modern guise, but the true one, the prophetic. He does not know whence he will come, whether from Warsaw, or Wilna, or Prague, but come he will. Alas! he, the singer, will not be there when the Messiah will march in triumph through the gates of Jerusalem.

In the poems of the second class, the main motive is the disappointment at the evaporation of the great dream of restoration. At times, he accuses himself for not mourning daily at this tragic episode in the life of the nation, for not breaking into the peoples' houses and awaken them to the tragedy. There is also a passionate outburst of wrath against Britain and he grieves at his own fate, to be "the poet who is burned in his own garment;" (Ben Damim le-Damim). In another poem, *Yerushalayyim Shel Sikarikin* (Jerusalem of the Sicarii, i.e. the sword-girded zealots of the time of the war against the Romans), the poet bursts into sobs at the death of the Jewish king—symbolizing by that title the dimming of the glorious vision of the Jewish restoration. With a tempo that rises from verse to verse, he calls upon the people to arise, even to revolt, not to actual war but to a storm of protest, to wrath at the Jewish tragedy, at the hatred of the world. He feels, though, that he is calling in the wilderness; but he the only *Sikarik* of Jerusalem feels that he cannot be silent, for Jerusalem demands it of him. In such shrill notes which often resemble the roar of a wounded animal does the poet of pain and wrath convey his message to his brethren. Only seldom does he lower his voice and strike his lute at a lower accord.

The numerous long poems which belong to the third class, I called poetic Philippics, for in them denunciations are hurled with vehemence and with oratorical flourish against Great Britain, the Jewish leaders who preach submission, the leaders of the Labor Party in Palestine, against the radicalism in Jewish life, the university, the immodesty of

women, and the godlessness of education in the Jewish land. The most typical of these Philippics is the long poem or rather cycle of poems *Rakab le-Bet Yisrael* (Rottenness in the House of Israel). We hear in this poem a rasping polemic tone but also the cry of a seared soul imbued with genuine feeling and a poetic spirit. There are in it numerous stirring passages. In one of them he utters a cry of protest against Jewish restraint when the Arabs murdered, pillaged, and burned; and calling for revenge, he says, "Such stillness is noted only in the stall after the *Shohet* leaves but not among people." In another place he draws a touching contrast between the prophetic spirit and the one prevailing in the Palestine of the day. In still another, he sings an ode to the Hebrew letters in their various metamorphoses. In former times, says he, they had composed the Sinaitic message, the burning words of the prophets, the song of the royal poet, David, the flowing sentences of the Agada, the divine poems of the bards of the Golden Age, the mystic murmur of the Kabbalists, and now alas! they convey in pamphlets the message of the "godless" radical politicians. Such is the poetic strain of Uri Zebi Greenberg.

His poetry may not raise us to the heights of Parnassus or charm us by its beauty, but it stirs our soul and makes us think of the Jewish tragedy which was played on the stage of history for millennia and had assumed new roles in each generation, the latest of which was enacted before our own eyes in the riots in Palestine.

iv. The rehabilitation of Palestine by the *Haluzim* is the theme of an interesting and impressive dramatic poem, *Masadah*, by Isaac Lamdan (1900). The first edition appeared in 1927 and the second two years later, a fact which testifies to its popularity among the Palestinian youth. This is explained by the fact that the poem reflects the attitude of the great majority of the young pioneers who flocked into Palestine during the twenties of the present century from war-torn and pogrom-ridden countries of Eastern Europe to undertake the experiment of rehabilitation. Many of these young men and women not only went through the horrors of the War, but were eye-witnesses of the massacres in the Ukraine and a number saw their nearest and dearest butchered. In fact, the poem is dedicated by Lamdan to the memory of his brother who fell at the hand of a murderer at a massacre in the Ukraine in the year 1919. Their nerves were shattered and their souls were torn by conflicting emotions, despair, desire for revenge, in one form or another, especially by joining the Communist movement and thus help to shatter

the old régime from which Jews in particular suffered so much. In such a state of mind, the experiment in Palestine appeared to them as the last straw in their turbulent stream of life and they clutched at it. It was not, like to the older Zionists, a scheme for realization of a great ideal, a dream dreamt for years, but more of a solution of the vexing problem of their personal life. There, in that land, young men and women hoped to be regenerated and to piece together the quivering parts of their soul. It was the last hope, for beyond that lay dark despair, and for the more courageous even death was waiting. This was the mental state of most of the *Haluzim* upon their entry in the promised land. In the beginning, joy, genuine or artificial, reigned in their camp. But the hope was only partially realized, difficulties were encountered, the great vision was narrowed by political, social, and economic circumstances, and the spirit of the weaker ones began to subside. Here and there dissenting voices began to be heard. "Futile are our efforts, our hope for redemption is vain." Others were lured by the lights of Russia and they murmured, "Let us go back to the land of freedom, the land of our birth." The wiser among them counselled patience and endurance. Fortunately for the Jews, the counsel was heeded by many and the great experiment succeeded on the whole. This mental struggle, the soul conflict of the majority of *Haluzim* form the warp and woof of the poem, *Masadah*. Much of this intensely human drama is symbolized by the name. *Masadah* was the last fortress held by the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 c.e. It was defended by a group of zealots to the last and was taken by the Romans in 72 c.e. only after the garrison had died by their own hands. The Palestinian experiment is then to the poet and his friends, the pioneers, who had various experiences, the fortress where they are going to make the last stand.

The poem is divided into six cantos or chapters, the first forming the prologue wherein his own flight to *Masadah* is described by our bard. He fled from blood-soaked Ukraine, where his mother died and his brother was massacred, to the only place where "the *Shekinah* still flutters over the heads of the warriors and the morning star sends upon it its bright rays." On the way he meets a brother fugitive filled with despair and mastered by feelings of revenge who cries to him, "A false legend is *Masadah*, a misleading light. There is no other way for the Jews to take revenge for their suffering but by hastening the downfall of the old order through the destructive force of communism." Another friend, lured by the glamor of the Red Revolution, cries to the

fugitive to join in the march of redemption of humanity. A third, totally overcome by despair, also decries *Masadah* as a mirage in the desert and advises patient waiting for the end. The poet heeds not the advice and knocks at the gates of *Masadah*.

The second canto consists of short poems describing the types of fugitives who come to the doors of the fortress. One has miraculously escaped from the gallows to which he was hoisted by "freedom-loving" comrades and a part of the rope is still dangling from his neck. Another is the only scion of a large family killed in the Ukrainian massacres who was left alive. A third is a mere child, whose hair is still wet from the tears of his father and mother, who was captivated by the beautiful legend of *Masadah*. They are followed by a motley crowd, faces scarred by pain and eyes dark with despair. They come to *Masadah* only to spend their dregs of energy in a last daring attempt at a new life but with little hope in their hearts.

The third canto sings of the joy and enthusiasm which reigned in *Masadah* at the beginning. Fires were burning on the roads and thoroughfares, fires lighted by the newcomers imbued by idealism whose souls unconsciously had absorbed some of the spiritual strength of those who generations ago sanctified the name of God by jumping into the flames of the inquisition. Around the fires, the young pioneers of the rehabilitated nation were dancing a dance of joy in the work of rebuilding. The scene changes in the fourth and fifth cantos. The intoxication passed; here and there people in *Masadah* begin to sober up. Difficulties are mounting, obstacles arise, messengers of sorrow find their way in the hearts of the builders, fires are extinguished and the tempo slows. Doubt turns into despair which grips the weaker ones, and many fall by the wayside. All, however, is not lost; there are still many who man the walls of *Masadah*. To these, the poet turns in the sixth canto which is the epilogue. He symbolizes their state of mind by the ritual performed on the outgoing of the Sabbath by the *Habdalah*, when people pass from the rest of the Sabbath to the drudgery of the week days. He calls upon his friends to separate in their lives the wine of idealism from the poison of despair inoculated in them by their past lives and stick to their posts in the fortress until victory comes. He knows that the day of triumph is not yet at hand, but is confident that it will ultimately come.

Thus Lamdan drew in blank, but fine and often touching, verses, the drama of Jewish pioneerdom which is tragic but simultaneously tinged

with hope and inspiration. Many passages are distinguished by poetic insight into the soul of the Jewish youth, and on the whole, it is a valuable addition to modern Hebrew poetry.

v. It is probably thanks to the influence of the new life in Palestine that there appeared in recent years several poetesses who enriched Hebrew literature with a considerable number of poems. Women poets were rare in the Haskalah period, for it produced only one poetess, Sarah Shapiro. It is only in Palestine that there arose modern Miriams and Deborahs who, like their forebears of old, broke into song.

These poetesses, like their brother bards, were not born in Palestine, but came from the sorrow-laden Diaspora bearing in their hearts the impress of bitter experiences. Consequently, their song is not one of triumph as those of the women singers of old, but is stamped with the same spirit of wistfulness met in many a modern poet. Thus, Bat Miriam, whose collection of poems was published in 1932, sings in a tone saturated with tender notes of sorrow as well as with an indefinite longing for something different than her present life, but in no poem is there a vision or even a glimpse of that other life.

She is primarily a lyrical poet and her motives are mainly her own moods. She has a long cycle of poems called *me-Rahok* (At a Distance). Apparently, love is the primary motive, but though there is warmth of emotion, there is no rapture at the nearness of the beloved but rather, as the name signifies, a longing for him whose voice she hears and of whom she dreams but whose love is destined to remain unrealized. It is an inspiration to her, and her sorrow is reflected in her poetry, but the whole cycle is enveloped in an emotional haze and nebulousity. Some of the poems, however, possess a certain charm on account of the tenderness they contain. Such is *'Ainayyim* (Eyes), where the poetess describes the various reflections of eyes; some reflect the sorrow of night, some quiet light, some the burning fire of desire which consumes the soul, some the first glimmer of love, some dumb submission, and some pride of conquest.

Better than the love lyrics are her national poems in which her desire to strike root in the fatherland are expressed. She is quite skilful in presenting a picture in as few words as possible. Her poems are short, and the stanzas contain four short lines, but they often reveal glimpses of wide vistas. Especially beautiful is the cycle *Hamah Yeshanah* (The Old Sun), where she sings of her past life in a series of poems, each of which is an exquisite picture in miniature of a moment in her girlhood

spent in the romantic atmosphere of a typically Jewish home saturated with love, piety, and peace. She has estranged herself from that life but it is still a part of her soul as she sings:

There cries in me the tune of my father
And the stifled sob of my mother.

The feminine characteristic is expressed in several delightful poems about her little daughter in whose tears she sees a glimmer of those shed by her mother in her prayers.

vi. Some of these traits are also in evidence in the poetry of Raḥel Bluvstein (1890-1931), whose tone is clearer and the poetic note much stronger. Raḥel was a tragic figure and her short life was distinguished by nobility of soul and a spirit of idealism. She came to Palestine as a young girl and worked as a *Haluzah* in the settlements of upper Galilee. Soon, however, she contracted a fatal disease from which she suffered for a number of years. It was during these years, when the shadow of death fell upon her young life, that most of the poems were composed. Under the circumstances, it is but natural that her lyrics, and most of her songs are lyrical, should be permeated by a spirit of wistfulness, and that sorrow and grief at the fleetness of life should be frequent motives. However, there is no bitterness in her complaint. Thus in one of her short poems she pleads with her friend to name her daughter after her. She hopes that the child will continue in the morning of her youth her own evening song which was silenced prematurely. Moreover, she makes an effort at resignation to her fate and at obtaining peace of soul. She welcomes every moment of joy that she can snatch from life and tells her heart not to rebel, not to harbor wrath and anger.

From the cheerless and fruitless present she turns for comfort to the brighter past, the memories and the echo of which serve as motives for some beautiful poems entitled *Hed*. Her few love poems are distinguished by tenderness. She pleads with her lover, real or imaginary, for protection, for warmth of emotion, and for a few minutes of happiness. At times, however, she is conscious of her fate and touchingly asks her husband whether the other woman who will take her place in his heart will cause him to forget her completely, or that he will still remember her and read her poems, in which her soul flutters, with love and tenderness (*ha-Aḥeret*). Beautiful are her Palestinian songs in which she expresses her intense love for the soil. She finds comfort in

what she did for her land though it was not much, only a tree planted on the shores of the Jordan and a path trodden through the desolate fields (El Arzi). In another poem, *Temurah* (Transformation), she sings not without a note of joy of the fact that the elements of her disintegrated body after death will mingle with the soil and grass and thus enrich the beloved land. Certain episodes of her former life as a *Haluzah* serve her as themes for the miniature poems, '*Al ha-Goren* (At the Barn) and *Halibat Lailah* (Milking at Night). They are insignificant in themselves, but the poetess knows how to envelop them in a poetic halo and they become glimpses into the recesses of a deep-feeling soul. Very pathetic is a poem, *Zaw ha-Goral* (The Decree of Destiny), wherein she asks that she be buried in Kineret, the settlement where her pioneer days were spent. The continuous song of labor heard there will penetrate even to her grave.

The special feminine characteristic is expressed in two poems, *Akarah* (Childless) and *Weulai* (Perhaps), in which her intensive desire and love for children is expressed with deep emotion and pathos. The poetry of Rachel is individualistic yet it possesses not only charm, but a universal ring, for it is intensely human and reveals to us glimpses of the life of those who approach their end with a consciousness of certainty. It is Palestinian, for there is hardly a trace of the *Galut* in it, and it is thus the song of the soul of the nobler type of *Haluzim* whose devotion and self-sacrifice contributed so much to the rehabilitation of Palestine.

vii. A different spirit prevails in the poetry of Elisheba whose very appearance in Hebrew literature constitutes an interesting phenomenon as she is not Jewish by birth, but a Russian who, like Ruth of old, became an adopted daughter of the Jewish people. She was born in a village on the shores of the Volga and in her girlhood attended a gymnasium in Moscow. There, through her friendship with several Jewish families, she became interested in Jewish life and began to study both Yiddish and Hebrew. Her studies deepened her interest and gradually she was more and more attracted to the Hebrew language and to the Zionist ideal until she finally decided to cast her lot with the people whose language she mastered so well. In the early twenties she made her debut in Hebrew literature by publishing several poems in the *ha-Tekufah* (Sec. 58). A few years later she settled in Palestine where her literary activity, both in prose and poetry, was greatly increased.

Elisheba is not a prolific writer for she sings only occasionally and her collected poems thus far form two thin books, one called *Kos Ketanah* (A Small Cup) and the other merely *Haruzim* (Verses). The poems are short, each consisting of a few stanzas, and they possess charm and elegance. The motives are mainly nature and love, but there are also a few lyrical themes. The tone is, on the whole, free from the sorrowful outlook upon life which we met in the songs of the other two poetesses, but as a born Russian and as an adopted daughter of the Jews, she could not entirely free herself from a strain of melancholy common to both, and occasionally there is a note of wistfulness. She excels especially in nature poems, for as she says in one of her songs, her very soul was lost in the beauty of the forests, dales, and brooks. Her miniature nature poems are, therefore, exquisite portrayals of moments of natural beauty tinged with a lyric strain of which the following is a fine illustration:

Ye green pines in the forests of my native land
Guard the rest and joy of my soul;
There are many trees in my beautiful land
But ye only know the secret of peace.
At sunrise ye raise to the light of the sky
Your hands—branches of candelabra
Your brothers, the cedars of Lebanon
Thus rose in years gone by in the hallowed land of God.

Most of these poems depict the beauty of Russian landscape but several also sing of her newly-found fatherland, of the charm of Kineret and the majesty of Jerusalem.

Her love poems are, as a rule, of a past love, the memory of which she treasures and which still serves her as an inspiration. The past is an important element in her lyrics, for as she says, "The past is also the future and the yesterday did not vanish but lives." The poems of Elisheba, though few in number, are because of their quality and excellence of spirit a valuable addition to modern Hebrew poetry.

33. DRAMAS

The post-Haskalah Hebrew poetry, like that of the preceding one, is not rich in dramas. There are only a few specimens of this species of poetic creativeness which really deserve that name. To these few belong the Biblical dramas of a young poet, Matityahu Shoham (d. 1937). Shoham possessed a rich imagination, skill in description and resuscita-

tion of long by-gone scenes, and vigor in portrayal of human feelings. And were he not moved by an erratic motive of rebellion against tradition, tinged with a feeling of half-submerged antipathy to the moral and religious spirit of the Biblical narratives, he would have produced a real historical Hebrew drama. As it is, his two dramas are distorted by that motive which caused him to deviate much from the Biblical story and become the champion of unrestrained passion, and denounce the moral rigor expressed in the narratives of certain Biblical episodes. It is possible that the young poet was influenced by Berdichewski and Frishman, both of whom expressed resentment against the Biblical conception of life, and he endeavored to give voice to it in his dramas.

The dramas are *Yeriho* (Jericho), published in 1923, dealing with the episode of the conquest of that city by Joshua, and *Balaam* published in 1925 dealing with the Jewish war against Moab and the Balaam story.

The first contains three acts and only an implied subdivision into scenes—the author evidently did not plan to produce it on the stage—and the plot assumes an entirely different character from that contained in the Book of Joshua. The *dramatis personae* are Rahab, the king of Jericho, Joshua, Akan, the High Priest, Phineas, Othniel, and Eldad and Medad, Jewish elders in the time of Moses and now chief judges under Joshua, besides priests, soldiers, local and foreign, and the people of Jericho. Rahab, Joshua, and Akan are mentioned in the Biblical story, the others are not, but they are introduced by the author for a special purpose. The roles of the first are also completely changed. Rahab is not an ordinary prostitute who hides the spies sent by Joshua but the chief priestess and sacred prostitute of Ashtarta distinguished by her beauty and charm. She becomes, of course, the heroine. Akan is not the poor soldier who coveted some of the fine things of the confiscated goods of Jericho for which act he was doomed to die, but one of the spies of Joshua and the lover of Rahab, and he accordingly becomes the hero. Of the others, Othniel is the second spy; Phineas who, according to tradition was the high priest at the time but whose connection with the conquest is passed over in silence in the Bible, is the chief justice at the trial of Akan and plays the role of villain.

In accordance with the changed roles of the characters, the poet develops the plot along different lines. In the first act, the scenes depict the preparations of the people of Jericho for war and the feelings of fear

of the strange God whose name they have heard of but whose character they cannot understand. Rahab is so attracted by the rumors concerning the strange God that she is mastered more by a sense of admiration for the foreign people who appear heroic as compared with the effeminate Jerichoans. The last scene in this act describes the arrival of the Jewish spies in disguise, and the lure felt by Akan of the rich civilization of Jericho as compared with the poverty of the Jewish camp and he is especially impressed by the beauty of Rahab.

The second act portrays in several scenes a banquet at Jericho, the rising feelings of Rahab and Akan for each other, and the ultimate love of the two which culminates in tragedy. The city is taken by storm—not as told in the Bible—and as the Jewish officers and soldiers enter into the banquet hall, the pair are discovered in a love embrace.

The third act has only two scenes, the judgment of Akan and the arrival of the messengers from Gibeon. The first, which is a long one, emphasizes with special relish the villainy of Phineas. Akan is judged for taking the articles from Jericho, though they were given to him by Rahab, and for his love of her. Akan is depicted in a good light. He remains true to Rahab, and professes his sin. He is resigned to his fate and bears it with equanimity. Phineas, attracted by the beauty of Rahab, is anxious to involve her in guilt in order to be able to save her in exchange for her favor, but his design is frustrated for Akan takes the blame on himself. Eldad and Medad who remember the teachings of Moses attempt to save Akan but the sternness of Phineas prevails. In the second scene, Phineas again shows his sternness counselling against the covenant of peace with the messengers of Gibeon. But Medad interferes again citing Moses who preached love for the stranger, and his advice prevails.

The purpose of the author to protest against the rigorousness of the ritual law of killing Akan for a few articles consecrated to God which were taken from the conquered city, as narrated in the Bible, is quite evident. It is his poetic right to embellish the Biblical story and introduce a human note into it, but the villification of the character of Phineas is entirely unnecessary and not essential to the plot nor to the strength of the dramatic effect. The character of Rahab and Akan are, however, well drawn. The struggle in the soul of Akan before he yields to the love of Rahab is psychologically portrayed, and likewise the attractions, which the strength of the desert people had for Rahab,

on the one hand, and the voluptuousness and beauty of Canaanite civilization for Akan, on the other hand. There are also numerous fine passages permeated with a deep poetic spirit.

The second drama, *Balaam*, displays the dramatic talent of Shoham to a still greater extent. There is less deviation in the plot from the Biblical story of Balaam's visit to Moab, his attempt to curse the Jews, his failure, and his advice to entice the Jews with the beauty of their daughters, which culminated in the killing of Zimri and Kozbi by Phineas. Still, there are enough of such changes to give the episode a different character. Almost all the *dramatis personae* are mentioned in the Bible with the exception of Nuah, the daughter of Balaam, who here plays the role of a prophetess, and a few minor ones. Balaam is, of course, the principal character, Kozbi, the heroine, and Zimri, a hero of secondary character. Phineas plays here also the role of a villain.

In the first act which takes place on the banks of the Euphrates, the first scene serves as a prologue introducing the character of the seer, Balaam, by an ingenious device. Two sages, one from Cyprus and the other from India, come to Balaam in search of a God. The Western seer, satiated with beauty, longs for mystery; the Eastern, tired of pessimism, searches for a living God. Balaam who knows only the God of wrath for he is master of the curse, has no answer to their queries. Doubt enters his heart for rumors reached him of the God of Moses who is also the God of mercy. His daughter, Nuah, enters on the scene in a state of hallucination speaking of the God of Moses and of Moses himself as the redeemer. Balaam, pained at her words, utters a complaint to his God why he made him the bearer of the message of wrath and curses, but attempts to persuade his daughter that Moses is a deceiver and not a redeemer. He himself, however, is disturbed and restless. In the third scene, messengers of Midian and Moab come to invite the wizard to curse the Israelites. The delegation is headed by Zur, the father of Kozbi, who follows him on the journey. Together with the delegation there comes Zimri and Phineas disguised as slaves of Zur. Kozbi and Zimri fall in love with each other, but Phineas also covets the beautiful Midianite.

The action takes place in the second act at the boundary of Moab. The mental state of Balaam grows worse. His own daughter warns him that he will not defeat Moses and he decides to lure the Israelites with the beauty of the Moabite and Midianite daughters, expecting their moral fall. In the following scenes, the growing lust of Phineas,

the love between Kozbi and Zimri and the struggle in Balaam's soul which grows more severe hourly, are portrayed. The seer feels that his power is gone, and he writhes in pain and is consumed by jealousy of Moses to whom God revealed Himself as a power of goodness and grace.

In the third act, the scenes contain first a dialogue between Kozbi and Evi, a Midianite prince, whom she intended to marry, wherein she discloses to him her love for the Hebrew prince, Zimri. This is followed by a description of the mental struggle of Balaam who makes his last attempt at cursing the Jews but blesses them instead. The war then breaks out and the Hebrews are victorious. In the heat of battle, Evi and Zimri meet and the contestants for Kozbi's love engage in mortal combat which ends with the former's death. Zimri is, however, not destined to enjoy the fruits of his victory for Phineas interferes, kills Balaam and rushes upon Kozbi. Zimri wants to defend her, but Phineas in apparent rage at the treachery of a prince in Israel, kills him, and Kozbi then commits suicide. Moses himself then appears on the scene and with his intuitive perception grasps the situation, mocks at Phineas' zeal for the sanctity of morality, but as a practical device sends Joshua to tell the people of Phineas' great deed who killed a prince of a Hebrew tribe for adultery with a daughter of Midian. The war ends, but Moses stands in the light of the sun and muses at the waywardness of men which retards the arrival of the redemption.

It is in the last act where the distortion of the Biblical story is most evident. Phineas, who in the Bible, Num. Ch. XXV, 6-14, is glorified for his zeal in killing the tribal prince and his Midianite paramour and whose act is rewarded by the grant of permanent priesthood to his family, is here made a murderer for the sake of lust; Moses, the great prophet, becomes the practical ruler who is ready to cover up sin and moral transgression for the sake of expediency. There is no doubt that the intention of the author was to supply the human elements of love, passion, and mental struggle to the rather dry historical episode as told in the Bible, and he succeeded in that to a great degree. The tragedy of the seer, Balaam, of which we have only a glimpse in the Bible, is revealed to us in its full pathos and is developed with great skill. Likewise, the love between Kozbi and Zimri is elevated here from pure passion in the Bible to a noble play of human emotions. The role of Phineas, however, is entirely unnecessary, and it casts a slur both on the Bible and on the great character of Moses. Phineas' Biblical

role as a religious zealot could have remained intact, and the human element could have been supplied by portraying a struggle in his soul between feelings of pity for the lives of two lovers and the stern zeal for his God and his people, and the ultimate triumph of the latter. Our author, though, actuated by a desire of protest against moral rigor of the Bible and championing the right of free enjoyment of life and love chose his way. It is unfortunate indeed that a talented poet like Shoham deviated so much from the spirit of the culture which he intended to enrich.

CHAPTER IV

ESSAYS AND CRITICISM

34. *INTRODUCTORY REMARKS*

The prolific productivity which was noted in the fields of fiction and poetry during the period under discussion is also evident, and even to a greater degree, in the field of essays and criticism. The reasons for such extensive and intensive activity in this branch of literature are not far to seek. It was primarily due to the national idea in Jewish life which directly and indirectly modified the attitudes of both the writers and readers towards the aims, purposes, and functions of Hebrew literature. No longer was that literature looked upon as in the days of the early Haskalah, and even in the later period, as a means for increasing enlightenment among the Jews, but was regarded as an important creation of the national spirit, as a leading factor in the spiritual revival. A widening of the horizon of that literature was a necessary corollary to such a conception. As a result, writers began to express their views upon phases of life, Jewish and general, which hitherto had not been considered within the purview of Hebrew literary activity. The subjects for shorter or longer essays became widely ramified, and included not only those of specific Jewish interest which bore upon the immediate life of the people but also those of a general nature, such as the economic, social, artistic, and intellectual phases of life. Simultaneously, the past life of the nation as well as the problems of humanity were also given attention and the interest in history which was always an important feature in Hebrew literature became intensified and deepened. There arose then numerous essayists who strove to create a literature which would satisfy not only the Jew as a Jew but also the man in the Jew.

To this primal factor must also be added several others. First, the number of periodicals, journals, annuals, and various miscellanies which appear at stated periods of time, increased. There was thus created a demand for essays, and the demand called forth a supply.

Second, the numerous changes which took place in Jewish life during the period created a correspondingly large number of problems which required elucidation, analysis, and intensive discussion. Chief among these problems were those of the economic improvement of the Jewish masses in the lands of Eastern Europe, the migration and settlement of Jews in new countries, and the colonization of Palestine. These problems called forth an extensive publicistic literature which found expression in articles and essays published in various periodicals. Some aspects of these problems, however, required a deeper and more scientific treatment. They were dealt with, therefore, in longer essays, wherein the historical, social, or economic sides of the question were treated. Besides, there was still the old problem, that of adjusting Jewish life to modern conditions. Some aspects of this problem now assumed a reverse direction. No more was the emphasis placed, as in the Haskalah period, upon introducing changes in Jewish life so as to bring it more in agreement with the general life by increase of secular education. That was taken care of by life itself. The attention was now centered upon the question of retaining the integrity of Judaism in the midst of the onrushing stream of general culture. The question of education loomed forth again but under a different aspect, that of intensifying its Jewishness and nationalizing it. An extensive literature of essays dealing with the different aspects of education, its principles, methods, social values, and their application was thus produced. Furthermore, the very national idea and its ramifications was in itself an important aspect of this all-inclusive problem of adjustment. Consequently, it also came in for its share of discussion which in turn involved the analysis and characterization of nationalism in general, and of Jewish nationalism in particular, as well as the ancillary questions of the nature of Judaism, its essence, and qualities.

The rise of Hebrew literature to a higher level, to that of a leading expression of the Jewish spirit, and the constant increase of writers trained in the ways and methods of European literature, called forth a corresponding cultivation of better literary taste, which in turn demanded that fiction and poetry attain higher standards. This demand was expressed in a large mass of critical essays. Literature, especially belles-lettres, was looked upon, as we have noted, as an important constituent of the creativeness of the Jewish spirit and it consequently became a subject for detailed analysis and discussion. The younger critics were not satisfied with merely reviewing stories and poems and

pointing out their deficiencies or good qualities, but laid down canons and rules of art, discussed the principles of fictional and poetic composition, and also directed attention to the life and character of the authors. Thus, longer essays dealing with the biographies of writers, appreciation of their literary contributions, and analysis of literary problems and currents were written in considerable number, and a whole literature of criticism was created.

However, the abnormal conditions under which Hebrew literature developed—as a literature of a minority scattered in many lands—as well as the limited amount of its periodicals did not allow for much specialization on the part of the essayists. Only towards the end of the period, due to the more normal condition of Jewish Palestinian life, do we meet a few essayists who made literary criticism their special field. Most of the Hebrew essayists were many-sided and wrote with equal facility on literary criticism as well as on other aspects of Jewish life and culture. To all the species of essays enumerated above there must be added one more, the *feuilleton*, a light publicistic essay corresponding to the American “column,” as a rule dealing with the events of the day in a humorous manner, though with serious intent. At times, though, the writer turns his attention to literary subjects or other phases of life and thought not of a publicistic nature. This species of literature formed an important feature of European periodicals and was employed to a large extent also by Hebrew writers. It had already made its appearance at the end of the *Haskalah* period, but it was developed primarily in the period under discussion which produced a number of able and useful *feuilletonists* whose sparkling wit and humor not only delighted the readers of their time, but possess, to an extent, permanent literary value.

With these preliminary remarks, we proceed to a survey of the extensive mass of essays and critical works produced by the leading writers.

35. PEREZ SMOLENSKIN

Perez Smolenskin, the representative novelist of the *Haskalah* (Vol. III, Sec. 44) who was distinguished by his prolific productivity in the field of fiction, was equally prolific as an essayist. But while his novels reflect almost completely, with few exceptions, the ideals and aspirations of the second period of enlightenment, his essays opened the way for a new trend in Jewish life, that of the national idea.

Smolenskin cannot be properly considered one of the founders of the Zionist movement nor the formulator of its theory, for the idea that the resettlement of Palestine by the Jews is a necessary condition for their continued existence as a people was pronounced before him by Hess. Nor did he, like Pinsker or Herzl after him, give to this idea a new form of expression. He always spoke of the colonization of Palestine as a possible solution of the Jewish problem, but not as a certain or absolutely necessary one. Yet his contribution toward the spread of the idea of Jewish nationalism was great. It was he who constantly reiterated in his numerous essays—which often extended to books—the necessity of arousing in the hearts of the Jews a feeling of national pride and of keeping alive the hope of restoration, even in Messianic form, as a means of preserving the national unity of Israel. It was he who gave to the problem of adjustment a turn in reverse direction, namely that interest must be centered on the question of strengthening Jewish consciousness among the Jews and not on bringing Jewish life in harmony with the culture of the external world. It was he who fought such erroneous conceptions of the Haskalah as the unmerited glorification of the cosmopolitanism then in vogue among the intellectual circles of Europe, and especially the admiration for the excessive and meaningless humanism of the leaders of the Reform movement in Western Europe. He, thus, though primarily interested in a Jewish revival in the lands of the Diaspora, prepared the way for the national idea, for its acceptance and espousal by Hebrew writers, and ultimately even for Zionism. His services, therefore, should neither be minimized—as they were by some of his younger contemporaries and successors—nor overlooked.

The essays of Smolenskin are marked by all the virtues and defects which are found in his fiction (Vol. III, Sec. 44). They suffer much from lack of methodical arrangement, due to his lack of a systematic education; from superficiality, for Smolenskin's knowledge, though wide, was never deep; and above all, from verbosity and an exceeding love for spreading a single thought over many pages and digressing into irrelevant discussions. On the other hand, they are distinguished by a broad range of vision of Jewish life acquired by the writer from his frequent visits to the many centers of Jewish population in both Eastern and Western Europe; by an intuitive recognition of truth which helped him to discover it, though not to prove it; by keen analysis which enabled him to detect the flaws in the views of his op-

ponents; and above all, by a warm feeling of love for his people and its ideals.

It was these qualities which enabled him often to probe to the core of things and casually pronounce truths which were utilized by later thinkers as the very basis of their philosophies. We cite one example. In one of his early essays he declares the cause of anti-Semitism to be not the economic rivalry of the Jews nor their neighbors' jealousy of their riches, as did many of his contemporaries and successors including Herzl, but on the contrary, to their abnormal position and low state among the nations. He further fortifies his exposition by a psychological reason, namely, that people are prone to respect the rich and overlook their shortcomings while they are very critical of the poor. He even saw that dislike of the Jew has almost become a genetic trait of the nations which is transmitted through the generations.¹ The first of these ideas was later made by Leon Pinsker (Sec. 113) the very basis of his Zionist philosophy, while the second was elaborated by Aḥad ha-'Am (Sec. 119) in a well-ordered essay.² That his views are as true today as in his time, it is superfluous to say. Every keen observer will admit that it is the weakness of the Jews which makes them the scapegoat in every social, political, and economic upheaval.

Of his numerous essays, the *Am Olam* (The Eternal People) is outstanding. It is not only distinguished by its quantity, for it covers several hundred pages, but by its quality, as it contains Smolenskin's principal views and opinions on the essence of the Jewish spirit, the content of Jewish history, and the Jewish revival which is to solve the problem of adjustment. The point of departure of this essay, or rather the book, is the question of religious reforms. This question, which is a species of the greater problem of adjustment, was a timely one in the middle seventies of the last century when the essay was written. It was a point of much controversy in the periodical literature of the time (Vol. III, Sec. 54). Smolenskin, in analyzing this question, follows his usual method which begins the discussion of the question from its remotest phase and involves many digressions. Thus, he approaches his subject through a discussion of social and religious reforms in general, which leads him to explain how differences in views and opinions among nations arose, especially in modern times, and this in turn brings about an examination of the two principal currents of social thought

¹ *Eben Yisrael*, pp. 10, 13; *Et la-Ta'at*, p. 106.

² *Al Parashat Derakim*, Vol. 1, pp. 169-179.

in his time, cosmopolitanism and nationalism. He ranges himself on the side of nationalism, for the much vaunted love of all men which the humanists profess is, in his opinion, a mere abstraction and is not based on the psychology of human nature. Love of self, family, and nation is the natural feeling. After establishing the primacy of nationalism in general thereby leveling a broadside against the leaders of the Reform movement, he comes to the problem of religious reforms. He makes an important contribution to the understanding of this complex problem by pointing out the special character of the Jewish religion and its exceptional role in the life of the people. The Jewish religion, says he, is the only bond which unites the parts of the people into one whole. It is more than a mere religion; it takes the place of a land, government, and language. Any change in it endangers the very existence of the people and must be approached with the greatest caution. From this conception of the Jewish religion it follows that it belongs to the entire people and not to any class, be they priests or Rabbis. Consequently, reforms in Judaism can be made only by the entire people and not by any group. In other words, there must be a spiritual revival among the people themselves. It is the very same idea which Aḥad ha-'Am later made one of his cardinal principles in his national Jewish philosophy.³

Smolenskin is not averse to reforms. He was enough of a *Maskil* to demand the removal of certain religious severities and the lightening of the burden of religious practices, but he disparages the changes in public worship introduced by the reformers, and rather favors an orderly traditional service. He finds, however, no way for carrying out such reforms except through literature, for the people at large cannot be called together, and the only way to revive their spirit is by means of knowledge. Here again the *Maskil* got the upper hand.

The question of reforms, though he considers it quite important, in reality is only a pretext for the expounding of his more weighty ideas. He utilizes it in order to emphasize the paramount place of the Jewish religion in life, the unity of the Jewish people and its integrity, and above all the nationality of the Jews. The last is his chief concern for he reiterates numerous times that we are a nation and not merely a religious community. In another essay, *Et-la-Ta'at*, he emphatically exclaims, "The distinct spirit of the Jewish people constitutes its na-

³ See his essay *Torah She-ba-Leb*, Op. Cit. Vol. I, pp. 92-103.

tionalism and that spirit will never die.⁴ He never defined the essence of that spirit, for though he thought religion the only bond uniting the people, he did not identify it with nationalism completely. In still another essay, *Et la-'Asot*, he attempts to differentiate between the principles of the Jewish religion and the laws. He says that a Jew remains a Jew even when he transgresses the laws, but ceases to be one when he abjures God, the Torah, and denies the hope for redemption. He further asserts that such a Jew would cease to be a son of his people even if they were to possess a land and government and he were loyal to them, for such views oppose the very spirit of the people.⁵

He is, however, not satisfied with mere assertions of the eternity of the Jewish spirit but endeavors in the *Am Olam* to describe the factors which contributed to the existence of both Jews and Judaism in the lands of the Diaspora through the ages. These factors are, in his opinion, the feeling of unity and the hope of restoration. He therefore emphasizes their importance and valiantly combats the views of the reformed faction who omitted all reference to Jewish restoration in the prayer-book. Hope in the future and in the Messiah should be retained even if we may doubt its realization, for when a people ceases to hope, it is in danger of extinction. This hope must be strengthened and so must the unity of the people. He saw in the establishment of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* in Paris, at the time, an important step in the direction of unifying the people, but the aim, says he, cannot be reached by mere associations, important as they may be. What is necessary is a spiritual revival. Smolenskin does not outline in the *Am Olam* a program for this revival, but leaves it for future essays. He does, however, lay the theoretical foundation for such a program by endeavoring to describe the development of the Jewish spirit through history. For this purpose he gives a long survey of the spiritual aspect of Jewish history. The gist of it is, first, that the Torah is primarily a Torah of life, is adapted to it, and is subject to change according to conditions—changes, however, are to be made by interpretation and not by abrogation of laws; second, that Judaism emphasizes spirit and thought more than action, and hence its eternity, for actions change while thought, if pure, does not; third, that throughout history the Jews strove to increase knowledge not only among a certain group or caste but among the people at large. To know and to under-

⁴ Collected Essays, Vol. I, p. 20.

⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

stand or even to teach is therefore an essential ingredient of the Jewish spirit. In this survey Smolenskin makes a number of interesting remarks which bear the stamp of originality, but he also errs at many points. He regards Hillel as the model Jewish sage, because apart from his many virtues he was famous for his leniency. Indeed, he contends that even Akiba swerved from the right path of Judaism inasmuch as he was inclined to religious severity. Following Luzzatto, he also takes Maimonides to task for his inclination to severity, and overlooks his philosophic contribution, and similarly Mendelssohn, whom he later attacked violently, comes in for his share of reproach. From this long survey he returns to the problem of religious reforms with which he began and offers the solution, which was already noted by us, and with this the essay closes.

In the essay, *Et la'Asot* (Time for Action), written after the *Am Olam*, he outlines his program for the Jewish revival. Repeating his assertion that Judaism emphasizes spirit and thought he comes to the conclusion that the only reform to be introduced into Jewish life is the expression by scholars and writers of their views on the laws and ways of religious practice and to allow the people to judge for themselves. This brings him to the question of the language in which the teaching should be done. His answer is that it must be Hebrew. He does not hope that Hebrew will ever become a spoken language, but nevertheless he considers it one of the factors in the preservation of Israel, for as he says, without Hebrew there is no Torah and without Torah there cannot be a Jewish people. Smolenskin never clearly defined what he means by Torah, but it seems that by it he connotes the sum total of Jewish knowledge. After a long discussion of various related subjects he formulates a number of principles to serve as a basis for a program of the desired revival. The first is a negative one, opposition to the introduction of any reforms which might lead to division among the Jews; the second, that all necessary changes should be advocated by means of writing and teaching; the third, that all such teaching be carried on in Hebrew;⁶ the fourth, retention of the hope of redemption, for this hope is one of the three pillars on which the existence of the people is based; and last, is the belief in one God and in the Torah.⁷ The practical expression of these principles is to be the initiation of a popular movement for the education of the young of

⁶ Collected Essays (*Mamarim*), pp. 176-178.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-202.

both sexes in the study of the Scriptures and in the mastery of Hebrew, which will foster loyalty to their people and its ideals. The conclusion seems to us today naïve enough, but the essay is not to be judged by its practical aspect, but rather by the emphatic pronouncement of some of the ideas which were novel at the time they were expressed and are today the common property of all those who share the views of nationalism.

Smolenskin really expressed all his important views on Jewish nationalism and on the problem of adjustment in the two essays, *Am Olam* and *Et la'-Asot*, yet he found it necessary to supplement them by another entitled *Et la-Ta'at* (A Time to Plant). The name of the essay is misleading, for according to its connotation we might have expected the detailed delineation of a program of spiritual revival. In reality, however, more than two-thirds of it is a polemic against Mendelssohn and the views the author ascribes to him, while the positive conclusions contain little more than what was stated by the writer before. Smolenskin thought that before we can plant anything that will bear wholesome fruit, it is necessary to root out all erroneous views which became prevalent in leading Jewish circles, such as those of the *Maskilim* and the followers of Reform Judaism. Hence his polemic against Mendelssohn whom he considered the father of both.

The essay suffers notably from the defects inherent in Smolenskin as a writer. It is marked by lack of system, excessive verbosity, and repetition and could easily be condensed to less than one half its size without loss of content. Yet it does offer a clarification of Smolenskin's ideas and an exposition of his view of Jewish nationalism. The main theme is the idea that the Jews are a national and not merely a religious group. Ancillary to and inherently connected with it is the second theme, that nationalism, while inseparably connected with the spirit of the Jewish religion, is not dependent on its institutionalized form or the laws. In other words, the author draws a distinction between Jewish religiosity and religion in practice. Smolenskin does not establish his thesis in a positive and affirmative way, but rather indirectly through polemics, and, as said, he launches upon a long and virulent attack on Mendelssohn and his followers. The targets of the attack are two views, both of which he ascribes to Mendelssohn; namely that the Jews are merely a religious group, and that the laws and precepts of the Jewish religion are immutable and their observance constitutes the bond which unites all Jews into one group.

It would take us far afield to point out all the errors Smolenskin made in his historical judgments, and it is also unnecessary to refute his charges against the Berlin philosopher, since his views have been treated by us elsewhere. (Vol. III, Sec. 14). We will limit ourselves to the task of summarizing as well as disentangling the positive views of the writer from the mass of polemics. These are briefly as follows: The Jews are a nation and not a religious group. They were considered as such throughout their long history by themselves and by the peoples around them. They cannot therefore suddenly cease to be one. Furthermore, they are a nation *sui generis* without land, government, and a common language—in short, a spiritual nation. Their whole history prepared them for that role. Their nationalism consists in the distinctness of their spirit and not in the laws, though the laws are necessary and no arbitrary reforms could be made by any one. The practical conclusion of all this is that a Jew who does not observe the laws but is saturated with national feeling and also believes in one God and the future of his people is a loyal Jew.

However, the question arises, what then is the essence of that spirit? To this Smolenskin gives no clear answer. He merely insists that the Torah is the very foundation of the House of Israel, and that it was the spirit which ruled the life of the Jew from his very entry upon the arena of history, and since spirit never dies, the Jewish people is eternal. That really helps us very little for the author uses the term *Torah* in an abstract manner, and more as a convenient expression for a concept which he could not really explain. Its general connotation seems to be, as stated, the total of Jewish knowledge and the desire of the Jews to increase that knowledge. In this, Smolenskin, who wavered between a religious nationalism and a secular one, found a kind of conciliatory compromise. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the only panacea he finds for the problem of adjustment is Jewish education, or in other words, the increase of Jewish knowledge. For this popular education which should form the great factor in the preservation of the Jewish spirit he really gives no plan, with the exception of a suggestion to found modern academies for the preparation of Rabbis and teachers, a very naïve solution indeed. Yet the value of the essay as a whole is not diminished in spite of its naïve conclusion and defective form, for it really placed nationalism as a factor in Jewish life and concentrated attention upon a Jewish revival.

Thus far the nationalism which Smolenskin preached and taught

was of a spiritual character without requiring a central territorial point as its seat, for to him the main concern was the preservation of the Jews and Judaism in the lands of the Diaspora. It is only in his later essays, written during the early development of the *Hobebé Zion* movement, that he displays a great interest in the colonization of Palestine, and begins to doubt whether mere spiritual and cultural agencies, such as the Hebrew language and literature, can really maintain that national unity which he so strongly advocated. He then asserts in the last essay that real unity can be attained only when the Jews will once more settle in Palestine.⁸ However, even then his emphasis is placed more on the spiritual aspect of that center than on the political and economic phases. In this he preceded Aḥad Ha-'Am.

Smolenskin was often accused by critics of extensive plagiarism and of incorporating ideas of others in his essays and passing them off as his own. Especially severe with him was Frishman. This charge was not justified. It is true that due to his auto-didactic education and to his promiscuous voluminous reading he was not always careful to quote borrowed views and opinions in the names of the authors. It is also true that due to his emotional and enthusiastic nature he was easily influenced by the works he read at the moment, irrespective of whether or not these views agreed with his own or with those he had stated previously. We must also remember that he published his essays in installments and wrote them at intervals. It happened then that views were incorporated which are contradictory, at least partially, to those stated before. Thus we find numerous points of resemblance between Smolenskin's views in *Am Olam* and Hess' *Rome and Jerusalem*, though Hess' name is not mentioned by the author. In the *Et la-Ta'at* our author undoubtedly displays the influence of Geiger's views on the position of the law within Judaism in spite of the fact that the reform outlook upon Judaism was Smolenskin's target of attack. Such contradictions and incongruities can be pointed out in considerable number. Yet it is also true that Smolenskin's essays contain many thoughts which were original for his time, and which aroused the interest of both writers and readers and paved the way for the development of more systematic national philosophies by various Jewish thinkers.

Smolenskin also wrote a number of critical essays on various works. He displays skill and acumen in discovering flaws and inconsistencies

⁸ *ha-Shaḥar*, Vol. XII, p. 265, ff.

even in treatises which deal with subjects he had not mastered, and at times his remarks and suggestions on Biblical and historical topics are ingenious. Criticism, though, was not his *forté*, and his importance as an essayist rests primarily on the long essays discussed by us.

36. DAVID FRISHMAN

If to Smolenskin belongs the honor of being the first to break away from the ideals of the Haskalah, thus preparing the way for a spiritual revival in Jewish life, the honor of being the first to demolish the Haskalah standards of Hebrew literature, to introduce drastic reforms in its form and content, and to infuse a new spirit which raised the literary production of the period under discussion to higher levels, belongs to a younger essayist, David Frishman.

Frishman is no new figure to us. We have already surveyed his artistic sketches and his lyric poetry. But while his contributions in these fields are valuable, his work in the fields of the essay and literary criticism is still more valuable. In the former branches of literature he was surpassed by many younger short-story writers and poets, but in the latter his primacy and distinctness remains almost undisputed. There arose, it is true, younger essayists who excelled him in one way or another, both in form and in content, but very few can measure up to him in literary comprehensiveness, in reflecting the entire course of the literature of the period from its very beginning to the middle of the twenties of this century, in brilliance and vivacity of style and form of expression, and above all in the influence he exerted upon several generations of writers. The last-mentioned feature is the most important, for while a large number of his essays seem to us commonplace today, they were considered a revelation in his day, and were instrumental in introducing drastic reforms in literary productivity. Important too is the quantity of his writings, for he was very prolific as well as many-sided. Not only did his activity extend for almost half a century, but it touched upon almost every aspect of Jewish life and literature. Frishman was the essayist *par excellence*. The short essay, the one which discusses a single subject at a time was his *forté*, for he mastered all its phases and aspects. He was the penetrating critic, the elegant literary judge who discussed currents and tendencies of general European literature in an appealing manner, the keen publicist who from time to time pronounced his views on problems of

Jewish life, and finally the brilliant and scintillating feuilletonist who was practically the creator of the Hebrew feuilleton.

Literary criticism though was his metier, for it is in the critical essay that his literary qualities are primarily reflected. The fundamental trait in Frishman as an essayist is not different from that displayed in his short stories—a sense of proportion. That sense which is the basis of all art became almost his second nature. He acquired it, as we have seen above, by his intense cultivation of European culture and literature and it became his chief measure not only of literary productions but of all manifestations of life. He applied it in the widest sense, making it the very essence of harmony and art. His second outstanding trait is his keen power of analysis for his mind was of the analytic and not of the synthetic type. He discerned deficiencies and shortcomings easily, but found it difficult to compound a complete theory or view on any subject, whether literature or life. There are many illuminating suggestions and ideas scattered throughout numerous essays, but nowhere do they attain completeness or systematization. The third important feature of his spiritual and mental makeup was his zeal for genuineness and individuality. It is the demand for these qualities which became the canon for his judgment of all literary expression and manifestations of Jewish life.

As a result, Frishman became a unique phenomenon in the literature of the period. He always stood alone, never allied himself with any of the literary currents, or with the various parties and tendencies in Jewish life. He was always the critic, the objective observer, the fault finder, and seldom the interpreter, the partisan or mouthpiece of any writer, or idea, or view. Endowed with a love of truth, he often spoke favorably of books and writers, and at times with enthusiasm, but never acted the role of squire or arms-bearer to anyone. Due to this attitude, he was frequently misjudged. He was often accused of being self-centered, arrogant, a destroyer and not a builder, and one who had little concern for the fate of his people and little interest in Jewish life. The judgment is far from the truth and the accusation is not justified. Frishman was an individualist, it is true, not of the gross type, but rather of the aesthetic species. He expressed his own view distinctly and clearly and demanded that other writers do likewise and that their writings bear an individual stamp. When such was not the case, his aesthetic sense was jarred and he gave vent to his chagrin in

his critical essays in a sharp and ironical manner. He had a strong sense of proportion and harmony and hence disliked verbosity, unnecessary and lengthy discussions, disproportionate digressions, exaggerations and disharmonious construction of stories, novels and dramas. He was the bitter foe of those who transgressed these principles. In his zeal for genuineness, he became the champion of content and thought in literature and endeavored to eradicate empty phraseology and meaningless euphuistic writing.

It is possible that were Frishman a writer in any European language in which literary standards were established and good taste developed, he would either have curtailed his activity or turned his ability in another direction. But since he wrote in Hebrew and made his debut at a time when that literature was just emerging from its first stage of development, when the mastery of Biblical phrases was still considered literary writing, when mere rhyming was thought to be poetry, and when the few able writers and poets still lacked a sense of proportion and indulged in verbosity and digressions, he found an ample field for the exercise of his abilities which seem to be negative and destructive, but in reality are both constructive and instructive.

His first task was to weed out disproportion, digression, verbosity, exaggeration, and all other traits offensive to good taste. It is true that at the end of the Haskalah period, there had already arisen several critics who attacked these abuses, (Vol. III, Sec. 51), but these critics were only occasional writers, and soon disappeared from the scene, while Frishman made literature his life work.

His critical essays are mostly written in the form of letters to a friend, frequently a woman, and the first target is the great Smolenskin himself, and the subject of attack, the very essays described above. He was not unaware of Smolenskin's ability, and in fact, always spoke of him as a man of great talent, but that did not prevent him from noting his grave faults. In a rather long essay—which is unusual for Frishman—he takes him to task for excessive verbosity, systemlessness in presentation of his thoughts, lengthy digressions, and general confusion, and even accuses him of conscious and unconscious plagiarism. We have already pointed out that the last accusation is unjustified, but he is undoubtedly just in his other strictures. This essay was only the first broadside of the young critic, and was followed by another entitled *Tohu wa-Bohu* (Chaos and Desolation), a title which he later applied to all his critical essays written during the decade of the eighties

of the last century and was indicative of his view of Hebrew literature during the period. Several of these essays contain a survey of the publicistic literature of the period as reflected in the leading periodical *ha-Meliz* as well as in several miscellanies. In these essays Frishman deals with numerous publicists, essayists, poets, and story writers en masse and utilizes his power of criticism, irony and witticism on a large scale. The faults and shortcomings he points out are the very same which he found in Smolenskin, namely, verbosity, empty phraseology, lack of content, and allied defects. Several of the writers, attacked by him later, developed into talented publicists, scholarly and philosophical essayists, and it is not impossible that his strictures were a factor in their development. Other essays deal with single books in various branches of literature. The judgment expressed in most of these is negative in character, for the critic found sufficient material for exercising that phase of his ability. With great strictness he demands of the writers proportion, content, and above all some originality, be they novelists, publicists, poets or writers of scholarly books. In those essays Frishman displays not only analysis and good taste, but extensive knowledge in many fields, especially in European belles-lettres. Several essays, however, are of an affirmative character, and though he is never lavish in his praise, he displays genuine satisfaction and even joy when he comes across a good book or a meaningful essay. With all his aversion for the Haskalah publicistic productions and their writers, he did not fail to appreciate the good qualities in some of them and spoke of one of the older essayists, Eliezer Zweifel (Vol. III, Sec. 50), with reverence, at a time when the younger writers disparaged him together with the entire generation of the Haskalah. Thus passed the first period of Frishman's critical activity up to the middle of the nineties.

Meanwhile there were marked changes in the literary standards of the period; the taste was improved, the style lost its ornate character and assumed a modern aspect. New tendencies made their appearance, the cry for realism and closeness to life went forth, European currents of literature, ultra-modern, found their imitators in Hebrew literature, and the whole productivity assumed a different aspect. Frishman, however, was still dissatisfied, and we note in his second period of criticism the same complaints, the same strictures and the same spirit of irony. He welcomes the changes in style and form, admits that there is more content to the articles, essays and stories, but with his

keen analysis he discovers a lack of genuineness and the presence of excessive imitation. In his letters to his literary "lady-friend" he satirizes the younger writers who echo the views, tendencies and fads of the European writers. He was especially displeased with the ultra-realists, decadentists, and symbolists who made their appearance in the belles-lettres of the time. He considers them unnatural and in this mood he even longs for the Haskalah writers who, with all their defects, still possessed naturalness and wholesome simplicity. He therefore welcomes any writer who displays genuine talent and is especially enthusiastic about Mendele Moker Seforim whose originality is beyond dispute.

As the literature developed and new critics arose and the number of European trained writers increased, the prestige of Frishman's criticism began to wane, and he ceased to be considered the authority on good taste and the arbiter in literary matters. Feeling his decline, he turned to other fields, to translations of European classics, to essays dealing with general writers and interpretations of their works, and his purely critical essays became, with the opening of this century, less frequent. He, however, continued to write letters to his friend at distant intervals, and in a more subdued tone. He pays full respect to the great talent of Bialik but protests against the excessive paeans of praise which reverberated in the entire literature. From time to time, however, the old spirit gets the best of him and again we see him occasionally expressing his biting sarcastic criticism with the old vehemence, this time against the younger writers who in the exuberance of youth had gone to extremes and disrupted the literary harmony. This time, in the last period of his critical activity, he demands individuality. He complains of the excess of poetic productions and the multiplicity of critics and essayists, and deplores the absence of variety. It seems, says he, that all write after a certain pattern and authors do not inject their personality into their work; he even doubts whether they really possess any. He returns to the subject again and again. But as years passed, his rumbling lost its power and he ceased to be the *enfant terrible* of his earlier days. Moreover, he himself became the subject of criticism, and in his last days he wrote several essays in his own defense. Yet there was much justice in his claims and especially in his complaint against the excessive production of poetry which is still a grievous fault of recent Hebrew literature.

It must be admitted that he himself was not above reproach and was

often guilty of the same errors of which he complained in others. He frequently boasted of his knowledge of literatures in foreign languages, and on a number of occasions borrowed motives from foreign sources, a sin which he decried in other writers. Nor was he above exaggerating the faults of writers or of transgressing the limits of proportion in strictures and condemnation. Disregarding these shortcomings, however, we must say that his place in Hebrew literary criticism is an honorable one and that he was a great factor in the improvement and progress of the literature. His work served not only as an incentive for good taste, but also as a stabilizing force. Frishman, with all his liberalism and the apparent spirit of iconoclasm which he displayed, was conservative by nature. This was especially evident in his loyalty to purity of language and his great love and admiration for the Bible. He acted as guardian of the language and was suspicious of any innovations which might impair the dignity and beauty of Hebrew. Among the many merits of his critical essays, not the least is their frequent treatment of grammatical and linguistic errors which were found in great abundance in the early writings of the period. If such errors later disappeared from literature, it was in a great measure due to his efforts.

Valuable too are his general literary essays dealing with a number of great European writers as well as with some of the famous works of European literature. A large part of these essays were written by him as introductions to books which he translated into Hebrew, for one of our writer's important contributions to modern Hebrew literature was his translations. Thus he translated *Cain* by Byron, the poems of Tagore from the English, and *Veronica* by Schumacher, *Die Geschichte der Kultur* by Julius Lippert, and *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Nietzsche from the German. In all these essays, Frishman acts as interpreter of the ideas, purpose, and literary quality of these works. Other essays deal with well-known writers, novelists and poets, and present to the Hebrew readers an appreciation of their literary contributions and an estimate of their place in world literature. Still others deal with the general currents and tendencies in European literatures.

Of exceptional literary quality is his volume, *Parzufim* (Portraits), a collection of essays written on special occasions, either at the death of a famous writer or at a jubilee celebration, or at a centenary commemoration. In these literary portraits, there is displayed the best that there was in Frishman, particularly his sense of proportion. As a rule, they

are short and written in the fine elastic and elegant style for which the essayist was noted, and above all permeated with a spirit of sympathy for and genuine appreciation of the subject portrayed. Most of these sketches portray Hebrew writers against whom Frishman often waged a battle or whose works he criticized mercilessly. All this is forgotten, and in the portraits there are projected the good and permanent values of the writer and his works. They are drawn with artistic skill, a few selected biographical data, a few features of the literary character, several fundamental traits of the personality of the writer, and the picture is complete. At times a single event or anecdote illuminates the whole portrait. We will cite one instance. In portraying Ḥayyim Zelig Slonimski (Vol. III, Sec. 59), the well-known figure of the Haskalah period, astronomer, scientist, and Talmudic scholar, Frishman tells the following story. The great German scientist, Wilhelm Von Humboldt, on meeting Slonimski, was greatly impressed by him, especially by the fact that this old type Jew, long-bearded and garbed in long clothes possessed original scientific ideas. He decided to present him to the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, and informed Slonimski of his plan. Accordingly, on the appointed day, Slonimski, dressed in European clothes and with clipped beard and curls, presented himself to Humboldt who was to accompany him to court. But the latter, on seeing his protégé thus changed, exclaimed: "What have you done, my dear Slonimski? Gentlemen in formal dress and high hats the Kaiser meets in large numbers. It is a Jewish scientist, dressed in Polish garb, with beard and side curls whom I want to present and not one in European gentlemanly garb." It is doubtful whether the story is true, for it is hardly possible that Slonimski walked around in the streets of Berlin in the Jewish Polish garb. Besides, a similar story was current among the Jews of Russia who related it about Czar Nicholas II and an enlightened Jew whom he met in one of the out-of-way towns in the Pale of Settlement. Still it illuminates the personality of Slonimski who presented a remarkable combination of deep Jewish erudition, a traditional way of life, and a mastery of the sciences coupled with a great power of inventiveness.

As was stated above, Frishman kept aloof from affiliation with any of the parties in Jewry and did not officially identify himself with the national or Zionist movement to which most of the Hebrew writers belonged, and he was accordingly accused of indifference to the Jewish fate. This, however, was not the case; on the contrary, he was a

warm-hearted Jew and undoubtedly believed in the national revival as his dedication of the greater part of his life to Hebrew literature testifies. The reason for his apparent aloofness and even the occasional irony which he employs when writing about official nationalism and Zionism was due to the aesthetic quality of his personality. The excessive tumult which the official Zionists raised, the exaggerations current in literature about the accomplishments of the movement, and above all the empty phraseology of the propagandists jarred his sense of proportion and repelled him from participation. The incongruity between the demands of the Zionist leaders from the people and the insignificant and weak response of the masses to these demands seemed to him disharmonious and hence his attitude to the movement. As a result he wrote but few essays on the important Jewish questions of the day. The few, however, that he did write are valuable, especially those entitled, *'Al ha-Yahadut* (On Judaism). In these essays he expresses views on the essence of Judaism which possess a ring of originality. After ironically criticizing the various solutions offered to the problem of maintaining the integrity of Judaism, such as Herzl's political Zionism, *Ahad ha-'Am's* spiritual Zionism, he propounds his own view. He does not offer any solution for he believes that there is no real danger to the continuation of the existence of Judaism in the modern world despite the disintegration of the old Jewish life. Judaism, in his view, is an idea, and like every idea, it is eternal. Like every idea, it has its ups and downs, but it exists forever. A time may come when a revival in Jewry will take place and Judaism will flourish once more. He attempts to define the essence of that idea, and while he is unable to give a complete definition, he believes that the essence consists in the special sense of righteousness of the Jews or better still, in their inability as a group to wrong their fellow-men, on a large scale. He proclaims emphatically that if the Jews would have had their own land, they would not have discriminated against a minority in the measure they are discriminated against by most of the European nations, nor can he imagine that they would have perpetrated against that minority pogroms of the type which took place in Russia and elsewhere against the Jews. Again, says he, it is impossible to conceive that if Judaism would have become a powerful religion that its representatives would have established inquisitions or organized Jewish Crusades and have forced thousands of people to embrace their faith or suffer death. It is this political humanity which is the external expression of a unique

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moral hereditary feeling, a part of the essence of Judaism, that guarantees its eternity. To this must be added, continues Frishman, the purity of the God conception and the emphasis which Judaism places on the constant striving for the ideal to be realized in the future, traits which strengthen its eternity. He fortifies his views by a peculiar political philosophy expounded briefly in the fourth essay, which is that the development of industry in modern times will ultimately bring about the weakening of the forces of the state, and that in the future there will be peoples and no states. The Jews, he concludes, already have proved to the world that a people can exist without a state.

In these views there are points of contact with those of Smolenskin, the very same writer whom Frishman had attacked so bitterly in the beginning of his literary career. Nor can we approve of his political philosophy, especially in the face of present day events. But his principal thesis regarding the fundamental quality of the Jews—namely their inability to perpetrate wrongs, in the manner illustrated, as a group to a group, deserves further development.

Still, despite his belief that Judaism will in some manner perpetuate itself, our essayist, like the official Zionists, also sought ways and means for the revival of the Jewish spirit. Curiously enough, this severe critic of Zionism who was so sceptical of its realization in the face of the indifference of the masses, believed in the efficacy of literature and especially of belles-lettres as a means of reviving the national spirit. The same man who complained so bitterly of the indifference to literature, and at times even doubted whether the modern Jews have a literature deserving the name, offered literature as a cure to Jewish ills. Wonderful and puzzling indeed is the human personality.

Our many-sided author distinguished himself also in the light essay or the feuilleton in which he was as proficient as he was in literary criticism. His irony, wit and brilliance, and in a degree his aloofness from partisanship fitted him for this role. He wrote many such feuilletons on a wide variety of topics, many on literary matters, a number of humorous quality, and many on the questions of the day. The content of a large part of the essays is of little interest today, but that of some still possess value, for the Jewish problems, like the Jews, are eternal. However, of greater interest is the form, for the fine qualities of Frishman's style came to full expression in his feuilletons, and this brings us to his style which merits a brief description. Frishman's conservatism is displayed primarily in his Hebrew style. He clung

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tenaciously to the Biblical Hebrew with which he began at the end of the Haskalah period and opposed all later tendencies of the period to infuse words and expressions of Talmudic origin. He limited such usage to a minimum. Yet he manipulated his Biblical Hebrew so dexterously that he was seldom short of words to express the nuances of all the modern views, ideas, and opinions with which he dealt in his numerous essays. At the same time, he endowed his style with all the beauty and dignity which Biblical Hebrew possesses. Frishman thus contributed much both to the content and form of modern Hebrew literature.

37. NAḤUM SOKOLOW

A contemporary and countryman of Frishman—as he likewise hails from Poland—and one who resembles him in some traits but differs from him in many others, was Naḥum Sokolow (1860-1936), the leading essayist and most distinguished publicist in the Hebrew literature of the period. The characterization of Sokolow as a man of letters and the delineation of his literary contribution present a most difficult problem for the historian of Hebrew literature, for he belongs to the few literati, not only in Hebrew but in world literature, who, on account of their exceptional versatility and extremely complex personality defy all description. We called him “a leading essayist and most distinguished publicist,” still that appellation hardly does justice to the multiplicity and richness of his literary talents. He also wrote several novels and a number of short stories, some of which are distinguished by their psychological analysis and narrative skill, composed bulky tomes on the history of Zionism, the life and works of Spinoza, delineated the literary portraits and personalities of great writers, scholars, and otherwise distinguished men, interpreted the views of philosophers, explained the principles and currents of the various schools of art, delighted the readers of Hebrew with hundreds of masterfully written feuilletons bristling with genuine wit and humor, broadened their conception of life and the world by his numerous travel essays and portraits, and even tried his hand at writing poetry with a certain amount of success. In short, there is hardly a species or form of literary expression in which Sokolow did not participate with distinction and with a certain individuality which bears the impress of his manifold personality.

We could hardly conceive the Hebrew literature of the period with-

out Sokolow for he was intertwined with its development during the entire fifty years in all its phases and meanderings in a most intimate way. However, in spite of all this, the historian finds it difficult to determine with more or less precision the exact place which he occupies in any of the branches of literature, or to describe with accuracy the influence he exerted in that field, and, with the exception of literary criticism and history, even determine the permanent heritage he left for the future generations. Yet his influence was felt and his spirit animated many literary endeavors and acted as a leaven and stimulant in many fields. His contribution was more in the nature of a spiritual force or an electric current, which is invisible and cannot be described in tangible terms, is manifested by its activity, and visible only in moments of friction. This peculiar complex of indefiniteness, excessive versatility, literary ubiquitousness, and remarkable spiritual elasticity of Sokolow can be partly explained by the story of his life which was as checkered and as picturesque as his literary career.

Sokolow was born in the town of Wishegrad, in the province of Plotzk, Poland, into a Hassidic and pious family. He was educated in the *Heder* and *Yeshibah*, but being endowed with exceptional ability, especially with a remarkable memory and an insatiable thirst for knowledge, he practically immersed himself in the "sea" of Jewish learning and absorbed all that there was to absorb. He became not only a distinguished Talmudist but was versed in every branch of Jewish lore. He soon found his way to Haskalah and applied himself with avidity to the mastery of secular studies, displaying the same characteristics and qualities as in his Jewish studies. Not only did he master almost all European languages in a short time—Sokolow spoke eight languages and wrote at least six fluently—but he also saturated himself with the literatures of these languages and the cultures of the nations. His mind was of the Catholic type which embraced all phases of human spiritual and intellectual endeavor. At the age of eighteen he married and lived for a few years in the home of his father-in-law, in the town of Macow where he perfected himself in other studies. During that year (1878), he made his literary debut with a book on geography entitled *Mezuḳe Erez* (The Fastness of the Earth). Two years later (1880) he came to Warsaw in search of occupation and was engaged by Ḥayyim Zelig Slonimski (Vol. III, Sec. 59) as assistant editor of his weekly *ha-Zefirah*. At first his activity was limited to the weekly review, *ha-Zofeh le-Bet Yisrael* (The Watchman of the House

of Israel). This review, which gave not only a survey of all the important events in Jewish life but also pronounced views and judgments upon the burning questions of the day, marked a departure in the publicistic writing of the time. He was a writer who was fully equipped for his task by his embrative knowledge of life and letters, both Jewish and general, and by his capability to express his views in an orderly manner and rich style tinged with humor and brilliance. He became the favorite of the readers of all classes for each one found in his catholicity the particular phase he wanted. The Orthodox enjoyed his Talmudic keenness and his *bon mots* culled from the entire Jewish literature; the enlightened, his liberal views, though always tempered with conservatism; the thinker, the bits of philosophy scattered in his articles; and the purist, his Biblical ornate phraseology.

Within a short time after he assumed his post, Sokolow became a part owner (1886) and the practical editor of the *ha-Zefirah*. For a time Slonimski nominally retained the editorship, but ultimately in 1892, Sokolow became the sole owner and editor, a post which he occupied for almost twenty years. It is these years of literary activity which made him one of the outstanding figures of Jewish life. As editor of a daily paper, his hand was always on the pulse of Jewish life. His catholicity of knowledge, literary versatility, and prolific writing in several languages, made him the arbiter of Jewish publicistic and the judge of all phases of Jewish life, and consequently his popularity grew. His opinion on the questions of the day, on movements and tendencies in Jewish life was awaited by the readers with impatience. A significant factor in his popularity and fame was the daily political editorial which he contributed to the *ha-Zefirah* under the name of *Dibré ha-Yomim*. The Jews of Russia and Poland, in spite of their comparatively secluded and circumscribed life, always evinced a keen interest in political affairs. Although they were barred from participation in politics, their curiosity about that phase of life increased, and the more enlightened among them who read Hebrew periodicals always paid special attention to all kinds of political news and made it a subject of interpretation in their conversations. All Hebrew periodicals, therefore, always carried a political editorial. However, most of these editorials were written by men who merely translated parts of such articles from European newspapers or recast them in accordance with the taste of the readers. In many cases, the views expressed in the article were often out of date as the sources were days or weeks

old. Not so Sokolow's editorials. They possessed originality, for though he, too, utilized sources, he also expressed views of his own, which were recent and up to date. But above all, he clarified to his readers the intricacies of politics in a manner they understood, seasoning it with Jewish wit and scintillating literary expressions. He thus acted as the Cicerone of world affairs to the thousands of readers in the cities and towns of Eastern Europe. He wrote thousands of such articles, and some of them could well compare with the best written in the largest newspapers of Europe, for he really possessed a keen understanding of diplomacy, as his later activity proved. This was only one feature of his literary productivity. In addition, he wrote articles, whole series of them on every Jewish question, and his authority in the field of world politics also lent him authority in that of Jewish politics.

Moreover, Sokolow retained through life his thirst for knowledge, which he never sated. He constantly absorbed whole branches of learning, read voraciously libraries of books, and what is more, assimilated the very essence of European culture, and the manners and modes of European life. He traveled extensively and mingled in various circles of society in different parts of Europe. He thus continually obtained new impressions, met the most interesting personalities, exchanged ideas and widened his views, and this richness of thoughts, impressions, feelings, and experiences he shared with his readers. He described to them the beauty of the lands he visited, their castles, museums, libraries, the nature of the peoples and the life of the Jews in the various countries. He presented to them the views of the great men he met, and at times, he dashed off a series of articles on philosophic theories, new currents of literature, or even on economic questions. In short, the whole field of human knowledge and life was his subject. However, his dynamic energy did not limit itself to the *ha-Zefirah*. He found time to publish and edit bulky annuals for a number of years, the *ha-Asif* (Sec. 54) for five years followed by the *Sefer ha-Shanah* (A Year Book) for several years, besides numerous contributions to other periodicals. In these annuals we meet Sokolow in the role of historical or literary essayist who delves into Jewish history, or Mediaeval literature, or currents of European literature as an expert armed with notes and citations in pedantic scholarly fashion. Thus passed the first state of his activity, a period of twenty years, during which he was the teacher of a generation, but curiously enough had

no disciples or followers, for he was not the teacher of a few but of large masses. However, he was destined for a still greater role in Jewish life.

The attitude of Sokolow to the national movement during its first stages, namely that of the *Hobebé Zion*, was at best one of sympathy, but not of enthusiasm. He did not identify himself with the movement and consequently exerted little influence upon it. When the Herzlian Zionism made its appearance his attitude changed. At first he was sceptical even of this phase of Zionism, and looked upon Herzl's brochure, *Der Judenstaat* as one more Utopia. But after the first Zionist Congress he became an ardent follower of the movement. The convening for the first time of delegates from all Jewry, the proclamation to the whole world of the desire of the Jewish people to return once more to its ancient land, the enthusiasm that animated the delegates, and above all the charm of the personality of Herzl, his sincerity, the loyalty and devotion of his followers, convinced even the somewhat sceptical editor that a new force had entered Jewish life; a new force which drew its nurture from the old sources which lie deep in the soul of the people, or as Sokolow later called it, the aggregate ego of the nation. Zionism became to him the symbol of national unity and the expression of the desire for revival and rehabilitation. He soon became the confidante of Herzl and a leader of the movement. After the death of Herzl and under the presidency of David Wolfson there was need of a man who could serve as the link between the Eastern and Western elements in the movement, and Sokolow took the task upon himself by entering the service of the World Zionist Organization as its general secretary. When the War broke out, he together with Dr. Weizman became the political emissaries of a scattered people to the allied governments, and the result was, as is well known, the Balfour Declaration.

In the work on behalf of that declaration, his was probably the more difficult task, for to him were assigned the more delicate diplomatic missions; to overcome obstacles, to eradicate ancient prejudices, to propagate the idea of a Jewish homeland among diplomats, prelates of the Church, and statesmen, and curiously enough also to neutralize the opposition of some Jews to the plan. These were missions where tact, learning, wit, and poise were required, and the *ex-Yeshibah Bahur* of Wishegrad moved among the potentates of the world as an equal, with the dignity of an ambassador of a sovereign people. When the

War was over, he and Weizman carried on the work of rebuilding, the latter as the practical organizer, while Sokolow stood before the world and the Jewish nation as the symbol of the spirit of the movement. Sokolow, as second in command, and later as President of the World Zionist Organization, pointed out the manifold character of Zionism—that it is not all economics, all finance and technique, but that it possesses a soul, a spirit, and a cultural phase which is as essential as the others. As the symbol of that aspect of Zionism he once more became the emissary of the Jews but this time to the Jews themselves. In spite of his age he flitted from one end of the world to the other, preached, taught, and lectured to scattered Jewries. Officially, his purpose was to obtain the sinews of war, i.e. raise funds for Palestine, but unconsciously, both on his and the part of the Jewries, the purport was to teach and to learn, to saturate with spirituality and be saturated, for Sokolow learned as well as taught. Being immersed in the very stream of Jewish life, coming in contact with representatives of Jews in various parts of the world, discussing with them as well as with leading men of the non-Jewish world all problems, observing Jewish life in its various phases in different countries—all these widened the vista of life of the veteran publicist and essayist and imparted variety to his literary work.

Sokolow, in all the metamorphoses which he underwent in the last twenty years of his life, always remained the writer, and the various tasks he performed did not interrupt his literary productivity. On the contrary, the older he grew, the more he turned to the type of literature which is of a more durable character, the long essay, the historical treatise and the book. Between visits to the various capitals of Europe and in intervals between diplomatic missions, in the years of the War and immediately after it, he wrote a two-volume history of Zionism (Sec. 106) in English. Between journeys he composed his Hebrew treatise on Spinoza, entitled *Baruch Spinoza u-Zemano* (Spinoza and His Time) in addition to longer essays of a biographical, literary, and philosophical nature and a multitude of publicistic articles on the daily questions of Jewish life which he knew so well. Thus did this versatile man of intellect, whose personality was a complex of various qualities, enrich Hebrew literature by his incessant activity during a period of fifty-eight years.

From this rather lengthy description of his life and literary activity we can deduce some traits of his general character as a writer. We say “some traits” and not a real characterization, for, as can be seen, he

defies definition and description. He was one of the few writers in whom life with all its varieties united so remarkably in one amalgam of many colors and hues. The best that can be said about him is that he was a representative Jew as well as a representative man, for his knowledge was encyclopaedic, his memory phenomenal, his tastes and feeling catholic. However, the outstanding trait in both his personality and literary character was that in him the two worlds, the Jewish and the general, dwelt side by side in complete harmony. In all his cultural vicissitudes he remained the Jewish *Talmid Ḥakam*, the scholar and sage, steeped in learning and the master of all branches of Jewish literature. On the other hand, in his excursions in the various fields of knowledge and art he was always the European, a man of correct information, fine taste and logical understanding. He was, as a younger Hebrew essayist characterizes him, "a complete orchestra in which many instruments play in harmony."⁹

Still this multiplicity of knowledge and variety of phases, while it constitutes the essence of that phenomenon which we call Sokolow, and imparts to him his special value, was also to a degree a disadvantage; it deprived him of originality to a large extent. It does not mean that our essayist in his numerous articles and essays did not express original ideas or opinions. There are undoubtedly many such expressions, but they are scattered and disjointed and do not unite into a system. He suffered from too much knowledge and often could not restrain the various data, views, theories, and judgments, from encroaching upon one another. He was at his best as an interpreter of opinions and systems, both Jewish and non-Jewish, as their commentator and as one who applies theories to life and to problems at hand. However, in this very work of interpretation and commentation there is originality of a peculiar type, for it represents a sense of both penetration and analysis, on the one hand, and synthesis and integration, on the other hand, and Sokolow utilized this type of originality in a very great measure. Everything he wrote is stamped with his individual character, both in content and form. Yet even this phase of his work suffers from too much knowledge, from abundance of illustration and illumination, for the kernel is at times lost in the numerous explanations. But this is Sokolow, the unbounded. This quality was, as said, also essential in his personality. He appears very often as the objective writer who sees a problem from all its phases, positive and negative,

⁹ J. Fichman in the periodical *Moznaim*, Vol. II, No. 38.

and hence he appears indifferent to the problem and its solution. In reality the case was not so. He had a definite point of view and a positive relation to all Jewish problems, but his wide conception of things enabled him to see all sides of a subject, and hence his apparent non-partisanship. His essays are stamped with a spirit of rationalism, for logic and analysis were traits of his character. Yet he possessed deep emotion, warm-heartedness, an appreciation of beauty, and an intuitive insight into the human soul, as his short stories, poems, and feuilletons show. We could go on enumerating many more apparent contradictions and incongruities in his writing but these will suffice to show the versatility and the manifold phases of his literary character which made him what he was.

The quantity of his essays, which run into hundreds and possibly thousands and are scattered in numerous periodicals and newspapers, makes it impossible to even attempt a partial survey of them. We will therefore satisfy ourselves with a glimpse at the content of some of them which, though written at different times, nevertheless, present a more or less unified view of the problem of all problems of Jewish life during the last half century—that of adjustment.

Sokolow entered Jewish life and Hebrew literature at a time when the old ideals of the Haskalah were proving futile and the new national idea just made its appearance. A reaction was taking place against the whole view of the Haskalah irrespective of some of the sound kernels of thought in its conception of the Jewish problem. Extremists among the nationalists considered the colonization of Palestine, even in its petty form of that time, as the sole solution to the complicated Jewish situation. Others, steeped in the ideology of the enlightenment, refused to part with it and looked askance upon the new idea of nationalism and often ridiculed it. In short, there reigned in the Hebrew publicistic of the day a certain confusion. Sokolow saw the weakness of the prevalent views and set out to clarify the situation and find a way to unite the good qualities of all. This he did in his essay, *Yehi Or* (Let There Be Light), published in the first volume of the annual *ha-Asif* in 1885. There he practically laid down the principles of his entire view on the important questions of Jewish life, from the fundamentals of which he never swerved, though as a whole, they were later modified. In this essay he attacks the publicistic confusion by showing the weaknesses of the views advocated. These weaknesses arise, according to him, through inventing theories instead of delving into the nature and char-

acter of the people whom the writers want to help. On examining Jewish history, says Sokolow, we must come to the conclusion that the Jews are a nation. Here our essayist offers a fine application to Jewish nationalism of the Cartesian dictum, "I think, therefore I am." The Jews feel and consider themselves a nation, and consequently nobody can take the attributes of nationality away from them. But, says he, we must also know that they are a nation of a different type, one whose strength lies in its spirit, and are thus to a large degree independent of a land for their existence. Therefore, the excessive emphasis of the need of a land for the further existence of the Jewish people, to the neglect of all other phases of Jewish life, is unhealthy. However, continues Sokolow, the further existence of the Jewish people necessitates a normal form of life. The normalcy consists in a balanced organization and coördination of the elements of the people, namely, the development of artisans, agriculturists, merchants, and professionals in proper proportion to each other. The Jewish people is abnormal from that point of view, hence efforts must be directed toward changing the situation. He therefore condemns the general tendency of the Haskalah which aimed to impart still more spirituality to an already over-spiritual people—especially the Jews of Eastern Europe—and demands practical Haskalah, namely efficiency in labor, business, agriculture and all other efforts which would result in restoring the normal equilibrium in the social organization of the people. For the very same reason he rejects the idea that the colonization of Palestine can serve as a panacea to all ills, for he says that preparation for such a national life must precede the colonization, and that preparation must take place in the lands of the Diaspora. He is also aware that this preparation must be not only of a material nature, but to a very large extent also spiritual in character. With all his belief in the eternity of the Jewish people he saw the disintegration which had entered Jewish life in modern times, and he therefore advocated a spiritual revival in the Diaspora. He thus sees the good in the national idea and in the colonization of Palestine, but hesitates to place the entire hope on the realization of one idea. He advises sympathy to it but sees the main solution of the problem in the efforts to improve the social and economic organization of the Jew in the lands of the Diaspora and in the spiritual revival, which will strengthen the national spirit and feeling.

The means that he proposes for the realization of these improvements are not important, for they were limited by the condition of the

times and were, as are all such proposals, theoretical. He considers education in the widest sense of the word, social, cultural, and economic, the principal factor in the proposed improvement. What is important in this essay is Sokolow's endeavor to reconcile the opposites, the espousal of the national idea, the emphasis of the cultural and spiritual, and his demand that these be stamped with the spirit of tradition. From these views, he never swerved.

It is in the spirit of these principles that he wrote numerous articles in favor of emigration to the United States and settlement in Argentine. He believed at the time, despairing of any changes in Russia, that these movements would improve the situation of a large part of the Jewish people. That he erred goes without saying, but that was due more to conditions than to a lack of insight. He was the first to acknowledge his error, and when the national idea entered into its grander stage of Zionism, he became one of the leaders of the movement. But even then he saw its weaknesses, and fought against the materialization of that idea as well as against its secularization and the tendencies to divest it of its spirituality.

The Jewish people as an aggregate was his chief concern. Parts and parties played no role; hence his numerous articles against partisanship in Zionist policies. A summary of his later views on Jewish nationalism and its relation to Palestine is given by him in an essay on social psychology entitled *ha-Ani ha-Kibuzi* (The Aggregate or the Social Ego).

He begins with an attempt to show the difference in the psychological states of an individual when alone and when in a group and points out the changes he undergoes due to the influence of the other egos. He shows that in great movements a new type of ego, the social, is created, in which every one participates. In other words, the individual ego is modified or something is communicated to it from the social ego. After adducing many examples and illustrations from history of the extent of that influence in mass movements, he asserts that every national spirit is such a social ego, and that consequently parts of it are found in the ego of each member of that nation and that he cannot divest himself of it. With the Jewish nation, that social or national ego was always strong and the individual participated in it even against his will. He goes into detail, showing the complexity of this national ego, its formation through the ages, and comes to the conclusion that it consists of many elements, the most important of which are the God of

Israel, the spirituality expressed in the Torah and, of course, the conception of the unity of the people, for the national ego must be preserved in its integrity. Any attempt to break it up into parts will only destroy it. But he is afraid of the disintegration of that ego in the lands of the Diaspora because of the other social egos which influence the individual Jews and vitiate their own. Hence, he offers Zionism as a panacea, for the Jewish social ego must defend itself against outside influence as it is not enough for a people to merely exist; it must also create cultural values, and that is impossible in the Diaspora. In this essay, Sokolow modified his former view of the independence of the Jewish people of the possession of a land. Conditions changed and he comes to the conclusion that though religion, the Torah, the Hebrew language, Jewish solidarity, suffering, and even unity of race are each important ingredients in the national ego of the Jews, it is only the combination of all that can endow the Jewish national ego with the ability to create. This composite unity cannot be maintained except in a homeland and hence the absolute necessity for one. Zionism, however, says our author, can in no way become the general idea of world Jewry unless it draws its nurture from the entire Judaism and from all the forces which helped towards its preservation and development through the ages. It is in this spirit that many of his later essays were written. He constantly championed the spirituality of the Zionist idea, its completeness as an idea for the people as a whole and not for any part, whether large or small. He likewise emphasized the necessity of the cultural revival which the later phase of practical Zionism so grossly neglected.

Essays bearing on Jewish questions were only a part of Sokolow's wide literary activity. He wrote a large number of essays on literary subjects, on writers, and on great personalities. Of these a number were collected in three volumes under the name *Ishim* (Personalities). Had Sokolow written these three volumes only, his fame as a Hebrew essayist would have been established. In these essays the best that there was in him comes to full expression. His fine insight into the human soul, the keen analysis of ideas, the typical Jewish humor, the wealth of stories and anecdotes, which illuminate the character of the persons described or the age in which they lived and acted—all these make the essays both works of art and of instruction. The *Ishim* are not, like Frishman's *Parzufim*, pen portraits, but real studies of the character, time, contributions, and personalities of the men discussed

and are comparatively long. They are not limited to Hebrew writers, but embrace such outstanding figures as Theodor Herzl, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Emil and Walter Ratenau, and many others. Of the Hebrew writers, we have Ben Yehudah (Sec. 40), Hayyim Zelig Slonimski, David Frishman, I. L. Perez (Sec. 65), Solomon Buber (Vol. III, Sec. 84), and a number of other writers and scholars who lived during the last two generations.

The outstanding traits, besides those enumerated above, of these essays are the personal touch and the mosaic form of construction. Our author did not write of the men he chose from hearsay or from studies of their writings, but from personal reminiscences based on numerous contacts with them. The characterizations consequently bear a personal note. Nor does Sokolow forget to perfect his usual method of essay writing which, as said, resembles a mosaic, often consisting of a number of shorter essays joined into one. At times there are digressions, which taken by themselves are complete essays or discussions on subjects of importance. Thus in his essay on Emil and Walter Ratenau, while discussing the latter's charge against Judaism, namely, that it lacks the elements of transcendentalism as well as of mysticism, on the one hand, and his enthusiasm for the apostle Paul as the man of great religious genius, on the other hand, our writer digresses into three lengthy excursions on the place of the mystic in Judaism, on the sources of St. Paul's teachings, and on Judaism as a religion of life and practice; and each of these excursions is an essay in itself. Similarly, in the essay on Ben Yehudah, he devotes, in connection with his pointing out the latter's love for simplicity in style, a number of pages to a humorous description of the ornate style employed by the writers of the Haskalah period. Such examples could be multiplied but these will suffice. Yet all these digressions which, in essays dealing with different subjects, would have impaired their unity do not, by any means, diminish the value of these characterizations, but on the contrary enhance them by comparison or contrast. A valuable element in the *Ishim* is the description of the environment in which his characters lived and acted. It is at times detailed and at times brief but is always done in a most artistic manner. It is this description which often helps us understand the essential trait in the character of the person described which would otherwise escape detection. Thus only after reading our author's masterful account of the palace of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, its art, its aesthetic simplicity, the beautiful gardens surrounding

it, the order and manner of life of the people close to the Baron, the inclinations, habits, and peculiarities of his temperament, are we able to appreciate to its fullest extent the judgment of Sokolow who says, "I admire and revere the Baron, not because of the millions he has spent in Palestine, but because the multimillionaire who lives in Paris is able to interest himself in a diminutive colony in Palestine more than in his multifarious businesses, properties, relatives, friends and numerous daily problems." These and many more qualities make the *Ishim* of Sokolow a literary work of the first rank.

The portrait of this manifold personality would not be complete without some description of his style. The famous adage "The style is the man" applies best to our writer. We have already noted some excellent stylists among Hebrew writers, but none compare in their uniqueness to Sokolow. All the diversified qualities pointed out in his character and literary activity are found in his style. Diversity, a wealth of words and expressions culled from the extensive Jewish literature, an exceptional ability to draw word-pictures and plastic representations, together with a skill for symbolic expressions, all united to form his style. He started out, as did all the writers of the period, with a style close to the Biblical, though not overweighted by euphuisms and fragments of verses. But as he proceeded, his style continued to develop; it grew richer, warmer, and more picturesque, until it became the remarkable amalgam wherein the Biblical, Midrashic, Talmudic, and Mediaeval forms of expression mingle and combine.

To this he added literary gems and *bon mots* borrowed from modern languages and translated into classic Hebrew. Sokolow strove for clearness and precision, and therefore employed numerous adjectives and phrases to explain the exact meaning of a term, and to discern the various nuances which it contains, but this very wealth of words and illustrations, this excessive variety at times defeats the purpose of the writer—the very kernel itself, oftentimes, escapes the reader. Still the reader is compensated by the imagery and beauty of the expression and the illustration. Sokolow who united in himself in such harmony the old and the new also expressed the same combination in his style. He did not hesitate to use newly-coined words which came into vogue in the later years of the period, nor did he refrain from coining new words himself, many of which became common property; he also retained a love for ornate writing when it did not offend good taste. He employed an exceedingly large number of Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic words and

expressions with remarkable dexterity, imparting to them a modern connotation and symbolic meaning. He possessed a fine sense of language, a keen understanding of its use and contributed two essays, one in defense of the use of *Melizah* in proper proportion and taste, and another on irony and its use in world and Jewish literature. Both of these essays are rich in content and masterful in style. These are some of the contributions of this manifold spirit who for fifty-eight years created Hebrew literature himself and acted as the leaven and stimulant of the spiritual and the intellectual endeavors of the entire period.

38. REUBEN BRAININ AND JOSEPH KLAUSNER

i. There was a time in the history of the Hebrew literature of the period, namely from the early nineties of the last century to the middle of the first decade of this century, when the name of Reuben Brainin was a synonym for modernism, fine literary taste, and sound critical judgment. He was considered, like Frishman, an apostle of the European spirit, and his influence on the younger Hebrew writers of that time was even greater than that of the latter, for Frishman, as we have seen, was stern, satirical, and often bitter, while Brainin was more calm in his judgment, and with few exceptions, sympathetic, and above all, instructive. He wrote essays on great European writers and Western Jewish scholars, on the canons and standards of fiction and poetry, on artists and art, biographies and characterizations of the leading writers of the Haskalah period, and often acted as interpreter and Cicerone of younger novelists, short story writers, and poets. He thus helped to widen the horizon of Hebrew literature, and to impart to it the aspect of a modern literature which it has assumed for the last thirty years.

His days of glory, however, did not last. With the rise of a number of younger writers, proficient in the field of literary criticism and trained in European universities and saturated with Western culture, his influence began to wane, and from the middle of the first decade of this century his contributions to Hebrew periodicals became rarer and rarer. Brainin remained, even during the last thirty years, a Hebrew writer by profession, but a concatenation of circumstances, including his settlement in this country which removed him from the centers of Hebrew productivity, placed him in the class of the setting stars rather than among the luminaries, and imparted to his literary career a tragic aspect. This tragedy was deepened during the last ten years of his life by his defection from the Zionist ideal of which he was the champion for the

greater part of his life, and by his adherence to the camp of those who see in extreme social and economic changes the Messianic era of humanity. Notwithstanding this, he deserves an honorable place in the history of the literature of the period which he helped to develop.

Brainin was born and reared in the typical Jewish environment of the town of Ladi, in the province of Mohilew, Russia. At the age of twenty-seven he came to Moscow where he began to prepare himself for entrance to the university in the department of mathematics. In the following year he made his literary debut by publishing a short story in the *ha-Meliz*, entitled *Gsissat ha-Sofer* (The Writer on His Death-Bed) portraying the last moments of Smolenskin. This was followed by other short stories and articles in the same periodical. In 1890 he left Moscow for Vienna where he sojourned six years, studying at the university and writing. During this time he made an unsuccessful attempt to found a new Hebrew monthly entitled *mi-Mizrah u-mi-Ma'arib* (East and West), but only a few numbers appeared. The name, however, indicated a new tendency which was to acquaint Hebrew readers with the thought, literature and art of the West as well as to improve the state of Hebrew literature, in short, to effect an amalgamation of the Jewish and European spirits. In this monthly the editor published a number of essays, among them one on Helmholtz and one on the Gaon of Wilna, representatives of the West and East respectively. He also discovered new talents and induced them to contribute to the monthly, among them David Neumark (Sec. 124) who later made a name for himself as a scholar and historian of Jewish philosophy. In 1896 Brainin moved to Berlin where he resided until 1910. During these twenty years (1890-1910) he studied much, traveled much, came in contact with leading spirits in literature, thought, and science, both Jews and non-Jews, and endeavored to convey what knowledge he acquired to the Hebrew readers of his numerous writings. He was very prolific in those years, for he made a profession of writing, and for nearly two decades contributed to almost every periodical and annual which appeared. Besides the type of essays mentioned above, he wrote publicistic articles on the Zionist movement, on various Jewish problems, two books of biography, one on Smolenskin (1896) and one on Mapu (Vol. III, Sec. 43), translated Herzl's drama, *The New Ghetto* (1895) and Nordau's *Paradoxes* (1901), and wrote reports and estimates of a number of Zionist Congresses. In 1910 he emigrated to America and from that moment his literary decline began. He made

an attempt to edit and publish a Hebrew weekly, the *ha-Dror* (Freedom), which appeared for a year (1914), and for a number of years edited a monthly called *ha-Toren* (the Mast) which appeared irregularly. But few important essays were written by him during all these years. He did, however, succeed in collecting a number of his essays, of which two volumes have thus far appeared (1923, 1937) and also published the first volume of his *Life of Theodor Herzl* (1919), the material for which work he had collected much earlier.

Judging Brainin's literary contribution on the basis of these volumes which represent the best of his writings during his literary career—the biographical books will be dealt with in their proper place—we may conclude that his forté as an essayist lies primarily in his ability to act as the interpreter of the ideas of writers and thinkers rather than in a critical analysis of their works, more as a go-between between the spirit of the West and the Jewish world, than as the propounder of original thoughts and views on Hebrew literary creations and their expressions. It is true that he loved the Hebrew literature and considered it the finest expression of the Jewish genius, and that he admired the outstanding writers of the Haskalah period, and devoted a number of essays to their characterization. However, when he applied to them the canons of European literature he found them wanting. He was thus more negative in his criticism of their work than constructive. He failed to see them in their historical settings and consequently did not appreciate their originality and their distinctive characteristics. Thus in his essay on Judah Leib Gordon, published in the first volume of the *ha-Shiloah* (1896), he attempted to rob this leading bard of the Haskalah period of his poetic laurels and even dared to state that he hardly deserved the title "poet." This severe judgment was not based on a thorough analysis of all the poems of this prolific singer, but on only a part of them, namely the polemic ones, and on deficiencies found in particular descriptions rather than on the general plan and purpose of these poems. The critic, saturated with the spirit of the best European literature of the time, and possessing an exaggerated conception of the personalities of the European poets, applied their ideals and aesthetic canons, both literary and personal, to Gordon, the ghetto-bred poet, and of course, found him deficient. He found fault with Gordon for the lack of paintings and statues in his library, for the ungainly features of his servant, and upon these and literary defects of very slight and of a very particular nature he based his judgment.

He completely overlooked Gordon's fine historical narrative poems in which he reaches great heights, both in the spirit permeating them and in the exalted language and realistic descriptions of nature. Gordon was still steeped in the style of the Haskalah and employed the ornate Biblical expressions of the day in some of his poems; but, at the same time, he was also the moulder and fashioner of the more natural, elastic, and varied style of later days. Brainin, however, overlooked his contribution to the development of Hebrew style and desirous of minimizing his poetic ability, harped upon his use of euphuisms. Brainin himself evidently felt the injustice of his attack against the poet, for only a short time later he wrote, in another essay on Gordon, that he was his teacher and guide in the use of a better and more improved Hebrew style and hailed him as the pathfinder in the adaptation of Hebrew as a medium of expression for new currents of thought. Many years later, in 1918, he wrote another article on Gordon's narrative poems wherein he paid particular attention to those of an historical character, correcting to a large degree his earlier judgment of the poet, but even then he failed to see the poet's best qualities.

Brainin was severe, though in a lesser degree, in his treatment of Smolenskin as a novelist. In a long essay he analyzed several of Smolenskin's novels in detail, pointing out their numerous faults and their defections from the canons of good taste, overlooking the fact that they depicted Jewish life of the day in all its aspects. Smolenskin was nevertheless his favorite author, for by his spirit of striving for change in Jewish life, he appealed to the critic. Brainin devoted a whole book to his biography.

Change and creativeness were the principal demands of Brainin in the first years of his literary career, hence his attacks upon the writers of the Haskalah period, and as an expression of such demands, his early critical essays exerted great influence in their time, for they indicated a new tendency in Hebrew literature. For the very same reason, he was lenient and even sympathetic with younger writers in whom he saw a departure from old standards and an attempt to introduce something new, whether in thought or form, in Hebrew literature. He was in many instances, the herald and the patron of the younger authors.

Brainin was more successful in his literary characterizations of European writers and Western Jewish scholars. In these portrayals, he acted more as an interpreter of ideas and as a delineator of spiritual and intellectual portraits than as a critic. His special contribution in

these essays is the emphasis on the biography of the writer or scholar. He was one of the first essayists in the Hebrew literature of the period who helped to develop the branch of literary biography, and some of his essays on Western Jewish scholars and men of letters, which are an amalgam of biography and literary appreciation, possess great value. Especially interesting is his biographical essay on Moritz Lazarus (Sec. 121), one of the founders of the science of folk psychology, and a writer on Jewish ethics. The typical Jewishness of this scholar and thinker is brought out in bold relief and is illustrated with numerous anecdotes and data. His essay on Georg Brandes is likewise of merit, for in it too an attempt is made to relate the character and the literary contribution of the famous critic to his Jewish origin and his attitude toward Jews and Judaism. An important quality of these essays is the personal note, for Brainin, like Sokolow, had personal contact with many of the men of letters and scholars about whom he wrote, and this note enhances their value.

Brainin also introduced variety in Hebrew essay writing, touching on subjects hitherto not dealt with in literature. One of these subjects was plastic art. His essay on Antokolsky, the famous Jewish Russian sculptor, is one of the few essays on this type of subject in the entire literature of the period. In it the writer not only delineates with skill and sympathy the life of the artist but also interprets the ideas underlying the creations of Antokolsky, particularly the Jewish ones, with understanding and penetration. Brainin also deserves credit for his style. It lacks the delicate irony of a Frishman, and the luxurious wealth and imagery of a Sokolow, but is distinguished on the one hand by simplicity, an attempt at precision, and an absence of ornate expressions, and on the other hand, by a new type of rhetorical flow of expressions and phrases borrowed from European literatures. Moreover, he helped to promote the general use of newly-coined words, and thus greatly facilitated the spread of the new tendencies and currents in the literature of the period, not only in its content and character, but also in its style.

ii. Five years after Brainin began his literary career, another young man made his appearance in the literature of the day and soon distinguished himself as an essayist, especially in the field of literary criticism. That man is Joseph Klausner (1874). Essay writing, is not, however, the only form of his intellectual activity, for he is very prolific and his contributions to Hebrew literature during the forty-

five years of his literary career are numerous and varied. He is not only a critic but also a many-sided historian, both of the Jewish people and its literature and of important expressions of Judaism, as well as a writer on philosophical subjects, and a publicist. He wrote a history of the two Jewish Commonwealths, in four parts, covering the period from early times to 70 C.E. entitled *Historiyah Yisraelit* (History of Israel); a volume on the life of Jesus and the development of early Christianity, called *Yeshu ha-Nozri* (Jesus of Nazareth); a history of the development of the Messianic idea in Israel under the name of *ha-Rayon ha-Meshihi be-Yisrael*; a brief history of modern Hebrew literature; and a longer and detailed history of the same literature, of which two volumes have thus far appeared. He even made important contributions to the field of Hebrew philology and recently composed a Hebrew grammar in which he deviates in many ways from the traditional exposition of that subject and pays special attention to the new features of that language as developed in Palestine. All these works will be dealt with later in the survey of the various branches of Jewish learning to which they belong. Our present concern is with Klausner as an essayist and mainly as a literary critic. It is this activity in which he is most distinguished and it is in this field that he exerted great influence upon the development of Hebrew literature, for he was not only a contributor to almost all the periodicals of the day, but also the editor of the most important Hebrew monthly, the *ha-Shiloah*, for twenty-three years (1903-26) and has been for the last twelve years professor of modern Hebrew literature at the University in Jerusalem.

Klausner is a fair representative of the younger generation of the Hebrew writers in their education, in their aspirations to modernize and secularize Hebrew literature and in their striving to harmonize Jewish life with general culture and tendencies. He did not emerge, as did many of the Hebrew writers of his time, from the *Yeshibah* of the Russian Pale of Settlement, nor did he have to battle his way to enlightenment as most of them did. Though born in the small Lithuanian town of Olkeniki, in the province of Wilna, he did not spend his entire youth there and consequently did not receive the education which was usually given to Jewish children in such places. He attended the *Heder* for only a few years but left it at the age of eight to be instructed privately by an "enlightened" teacher in the Hebrew language and its literature. At the age of eleven he went to Odessa, whither his parents moved. There for a few years he attended the local *Yeshibah*,

which, however, possessed neither the intensity of spirit of a *Yeshibah* nor its exclusiveness. He soon left that institution and began to prepare himself for entrance into the university. Odessa was at the time a center of Hebrew literature and of the national movement and young Klausner came in contact with a number of Hebrew writers and leaders of the national movement, among whom was also Aḥad ha-'Am (Sec. 119). He became saturated with the spirit of that circle which strove to solve the grave problem of adjustment through the national ideal and thus integrate once more the Jewish people as a creative member in the family of nations, and he decided to dedicate himself to the furtherance of that cause. The question of turning Hebrew from a literary into a spoken language, which was intimately connected with that of widening its scope and introducing new words and terms, was at the time much discussed in literary circles, and Klausner became greatly interested in it. He accordingly made his debut in literature with an article in the *ha-Meliẓ* (1893) on the subject of coining words and terms in Hebrew and their proper orthography. This was soon followed by a lengthy essay entitled, *The Poet Judah Leib Gordon and His Views on Jewish Nationalism*. Shortly afterwards he published his treatise *Sefat Eber Safah Hayyah* (Hebrew as a Living Language) in which he discussed the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language from a scientific point of view. In 1897, he left Russia for Germany where he entered the Heidelberg University and studied philosophy and the Oriental languages. His student years, during which he engaged in the study of several fields of knowledge were years of great literary productivity for our writer. Like Brainin and others, he strove to impart as much of the European culture to the Hebrew readers as possible and endeavored to raise the level of the literature of his people. But unlike other writers of the time, his activity, though multifarious, was not of a haphazard nature, but was coördinated by a definite point of view. Saturated as he was with both Jewish and European cultures, there was no conflict in him between the Jew and the man, and it is this harmonization which he aimed to carry through in Jewish life on a large scale and which he propagated in all his essays, including those of literary criticism. He even made it the basis of his historical works. *Yahadut-wa-Anushiyut* (Judaism and Humanism) became his slogan and the unity of the two, his ideal. He wrote a number of essays which are all permeated with that spirit and which were collected and published in 1905 under that title.

The unity of Judaism and humanism was, and is, the ideal of many of the leaders of Jewish nationalism, but with Klausner, it assumes a special connotation. In the very preface to that collection he asserts that there is really no differentiation between general human thought and the fundamental expression of the national Jewish spirit. The latter is only humanism in a national form. He fortifies his view by an assertion in his essay, *Tehiyah we-Hithadshut* (Revival and Regeneration), that the spirit of humanism, namely the general culture and civilization of humanity, has absorbed so much of Judaism that Jewish elements became an integral and inseparable part of its entire web. In fact, he claims in still another essay that many thinkers of various European nations were Jews in spirit though not by race and religion. If that is the case, he continues, the relation of Judaism to humanism is that of a part to the whole and consequently there is no rift between the two. The whole problem of adjustment which raised such bitter strife in Hebrew literature, in the late nineties, between the younger writers who demanded the humanization of Jewish life and the older who insisted on Jewishness, is thus easily solved.

Klausner, however, is quite well aware that the Judaism of our day or that of the exile is of a peculiar character and contains many forms of life and thought which were not absorbed by humanism, and he therefore limits the humanistic aspect of Judaism to its original elements; namely, those spiritual and intellectual values which were created during the early period of Jewish history and not the products of the exile. The values created during the period of exile are of secondary importance. The national revival which Zionism advocates is a return to the original pure form of Judaism dressed in modern garb and not to the exilic type. He further stresses the fact that the Jewish people, like any other nation, has a historical mission, which is, not to teach monotheism, but to develop itself along its natural lines and to contribute to the development of humanity as a member of the organism as a whole. In order to attain that end, the possession of a land is necessary, for otherwise that mission cannot be carried out, as humanism, in its best aspect, can absorb only such contributions which are made by an unhampered national genius. It is these contributions which through a long process become part and parcel of the spirit of civilized humanity. Such are, in his view, the unity of God, the idea of pure morality, Messianism and prophecy; all of these, creations of the most original and typically national period in Jewish history. It is the

further development of these values at which the national revival should aim. Such development is, however, only possible in connection with the development of all other human values. It is therefore the function of Hebrew literature to be as humanistic as it is Jewish, for the two, as said, are one under two aspects. Furthermore, says he, it is the function of Jewish learning to concentrate its attention on the investigation of the expressions of the Jewish spirit during its early period and not on that of the exile. In short, he champions unity between the creativity of Israel's early period and the development of the Jewish people, ignoring or overlooking the long period of exile lying between the two.

This in brief is the gist of the thoughts and ideas of the various essays included in the collection bearing the title, *Judaism and Humanism*. That some of the ideas expounded are not original is the least of the faults of this view. There are graver and more serious defects. There is no coördination of thought in this view or philosophy, but a conglomeration of generalities. In no place does the essayist really define the essence of these eternal human values in Judaism. He speaks constantly of the Jewish contribution of monotheism, but he usually limits it to the abstract aspect of the belief in one God with an occasional reference to its influence on the development of morality. He neglects entirely the emotional and mystic aspects of Judaism. He is more specific as far as Jewish ethics is concerned and seems to see in it the principal expression of the Jewish genius but does not delineate its character. Likewise, the Messianic idea is only referred to but not expounded. He tried, however, to remedy these defects in his special treatises referred to above, and it will be seen how far he succeeded. The gravest defect in his view is that, in spite of his insistence and emphasis on development and evolution both in the life of the individual and that of the nation, he disregards these very principles by advocating a return to the prophetic or early spiritual state of Jewish life without taking into consideration all the later developments of the Jewish spirit during the long exile. Such a return is as impossible as is the return of an old man to the psychological state of his youth. The Jewish spirit of today undoubtedly contains some elements of the prophetic state, but these elements cannot be singled out for the spirit has been modified, altered, and reconstructed by the vicissitudes and experiences of the nation during the centuries into an entirely different entity, undoubtedly much richer and more varied. Cries for the return

to the original period of activity of the Jewish spirit are baseless. A unity of the distant past with the future development of the Jewish genius, omitting the long and fruitful period of the exile, is contrary to all psychology and history.

Still, Klausner's constant insistence on the unity of Judaism with humanism and on the necessity of endowing Hebrew literature and Jewish culture with the best qualities of European creations, exerted wide influence on the literature of the day, especially on the younger writers. This influence was mainly conveyed through his essays in the field of literary criticism. Klausner, the critic, undoubtedly excels Klausner, the essayist, on general Jewish subjects. For a number of years, he acted as the teacher and guide of many younger writers, novelists, short story writers and poets. He did not, however, limit himself to the younger writers but also gave estimates of the older writers and poets, and thus embraced in his literary essays and appreciations the leading men of two generations. These essays, he later collected into volumes under the general euphuistic title, *Yozrim u-Bonim* (Creators and Builders) of which three volumes have thus far appeared. First of the fundamental characteristics of Klausner's criticism is his search for the qualities of humanism in the stories, poems, or essays of the writers, or still better for the unity of the Jewish and the general human spirit. This serves him as a canon which he applies to the works reviewed by him. The second trait is interpretation, for he concentrates more on presenting the views and the meaning of the ideas these works contain than on the analysis of their artistic qualities. The third is comprehensiveness. He seldom devotes only one essay to a leading writer or poet, but discusses him in three, four, five, or even more essays. Thus to Ahad ha-'Am he devotes four, and to Tschernichowski, his particular favorite, eleven. On the whole, he follows a certain system in the groups of articles devoted to single writers or poets, though they were written at different times and were separated by long intervals of years. Thus his first essay on Ahad ha-'Am deals with his biography and gives a survey of his principal views. The second is devoted to a defense of some of his views against critics and incidentally to their clarification. The third discusses the personality and character of this thinker as reflected in the six volumes of letters, while the fourth is a brief discussion of some of the traits in his character for it was written immediately after his death, more as a eulogy than as an essay. Of the five essays on Mendele, the first deals with his biography,

the second and third with the characteristics of his art, while the fourth deals with the man himself. The fifth is a supplement characterizing Mendele as he was revealed in his conversations and personal relations with friends and colleagues. In general, it can be said that his group of essays on Mendele are among the best Klausner has written in the field of literary criticism. He deals similarly with other writers, and thus, as a rule, we get adequate conceptions of the literary character of the writers or poets together with a portrait of their personalities.

On the other hand, Klausner is subjective rather than objective in his judgments. He is very frequently partisan and is therefore prone to exaggerations, overlooking faults and shortcomings. Many of the writers he deals with are his favorites, and consequently he is lavish with superlatives and in comparisons of their works with those of the famous European writers or poets, often finds the former excelling the latter. Thus he bestows upon Aḥad ha-'Am the title "the superman and the perfect Jew" though he, at the same time, points out shortcomings in his writings and character. With Klausner defects or limitations evidently do not interfere with perfection. Similar exaggerations and meaningless epithets and titles abound in his essays. These shortcomings, however, are much extenuated in the light of the critic's statement in his preface to the third volume of *Yozrim u-Bonim*—"There is one quality common to the various essays of the volumes. They were all written with a spirit of intense love for our modern Hebrew literature and with an intent to prove to the young readers that this literature is on a plane with the literatures of the important European languages." Many things are pardoned a lover, and certainly the praise of the beauty of his beloved; it must be admitted that the good qualities in Klausner's criticism exceed the weaker and the imperfect traits.

39. *THE REBELS (MICAH JOSEPH BERDICHEWSKI AND SAUL HURWITZ)*

i. The problem of adjustment which, as we have seen, occupies such an important place in modern Hebrew literature and serves as a leading motive in the essays of many writers of the period is no where reflected as keenly as in the essays of Micah Joseph Berdichewski. This colorful writer whose many-sidedness was noted above (Sec. 16) typified in his own personality the dualism in the soul of the modern Jew, the conflict raging in it between the heritage of the ages, which

demands a certain exclusiveness in life, and the desire to be like others, not only to share in the cultural values of the European civilization but to absorb them to the fullest extent. During his whole life, his soul was the battle ground between these two forces. His life and education accentuated that struggle. He was steeped, as described above, for a great part of his life in Jewish learning and piety, having spent his youth in a Hassidic atmosphere and his adolescent days in the famous academy of Volozhin where Torah was the very breath of life. However, even in those years, there were occasional rebellious outbursts in his soul, for his poetic sense often revolted against the narrowness and drabness of the ghetto, but these outbursts were stifled by force of tradition and environment. When this impetuous youth grew into manhood and his way led into the Western world, into the halls of learning of the German universities, the struggle broke out in full force. Deeply impressed by the writings of the great thinkers—for a time he was especially influenced by Nietzsche—and captivated by the beauty both of art and of nature, as revealed to him in literature, in museums, and in the grandeur of Switzerland, he strove to divest himself of his former self, but could not. He gave expression to these feelings and desires in numerous essays, raging against Jewish absorption in the Book, condemning the dead hand of tradition which controls the life of present day Jews, insisting on a return to nature and an appreciation of beauty, and demanding a transvaluation of values in general. On the other hand, in certain moments, in a different mood, he sings of the spiritual glories of Hassidism and reveres the holiness of tradition. We have no better means to describe the dual character of Berdichewski's essays and the spirit of conflict raging in them than by using his own characterization of himself. He says in one of his essays: "With my hands I destroy old values, but simultaneously I remove from my feet my shoes—in good Biblical tradition—in order not to desecrate our holy soil. I strive for reconciliation and unity in my inner self as well as for the creation of a new people, but in vain. The soul remains divided and for generations we will continue thus."¹⁰

In view of this conflict and struggle which continued during the greater part of the period of his literary activity, it would be vain to look for unity of thought or for systematic expression of ideas and opinions in his essays, for contradictions and opposing thoughts and sentiments abound. He is a rebel and an iconoclast as well as an

¹⁰ Collected Essays, Cycle II, Vol. I, p. 74.

admirer of tradition and of the mystic in Judaism, both an idealist and a realist, an individualist and a nationalist. All these thoughts find expression in his essays, to an extent in different periods of his literary activity, but very frequently at the same time. These traits make a survey of his views very difficult. To this difficulty, arising from the character of the content, there is to be added another one due to the form of the essays. Berdichewski belongs to that type of essayists who mingle poetry and reflective thought in an indiscriminate way—Nietzsche was his model,—and we are very often unable to determine where the former ends and the latter begins. Besides, there is a distinct polemic tendency in his essays for often they center around thoughts and views of others expressed in books or articles and thus assume the form of commentaries on, or criticism of ideas, systems, views, and opinions of the leading writers of the day. He makes copious use of quotations, and at times, his own contribution is only a brief remark or two, consisting of a paragraph or a few lines. Yet, in spite of these obstacles, we will venture to give a general survey of his views and ideas, for his essays are permeated with a spirit of both sincerity and pathos and contain genuine poetic feeling, as well as occasional illuminating flashes of thought. In his time, he exerted extensive influence upon a group of younger writers.

Berdichewski was a prolific essayist and during the twenty-five years of his activity in this field, he touched on every phase of Jewish life and literature. He dealt with such problems as the nature and character of Judaism, the destiny of the Jewish nation, the needs of the individual Jew, questions of the day, and in addition with all types of literary criticism—reviews of books, characterizations of leading writers, and questions of taste and style. Partial collections of his essays were published at various times, but a complete posthumous collection, in nine slender volumes, was issued in 1922. This collection is divided into three cycles, each comprising three volumes. The first, denominated *be-Sede Sefer* (In the Field of Literature), deals with certain general phases of Hebrew literature, the nature of poetry, and questions of style, (Vol. I) with characterizations of leading writers (Vol. II), and reviews of books (Vol. III). The second cycle, entitled *ba-Derek* (On the Way), is primarily devoted to a presentation of his views on Hassidism and mysticism, general thoughts of a poetico-philosophical nature and brief discussions of traits of Jewish life and history (Vol. I), essays on transvaluations of Jewish values (Vol. II), and articles on

national problems (Vol. III). The third cycle, called *Maḥshabot we-Torot* (Reflections and Teachings), contains miscellaneous essays on various subjects: poetic, philosophic, theological, folkloristic, and even notes and comments on Agadic passages.

It is the second cycle of essays which is of main importance for the understanding of the writer's views and opinions, for it reflects to a very great extent the changes which transpired in his soul during a great part of the period of his literary activity. The essayist himself, in his preface to the first volume of this cycle, supplies the key to his personality. He says, "Time and again, I searched for ways in life. That which was to me one day a certainty became doubtful another day, the positive became a "perhaps," light turned to shadows. My writings are thus only links in the chain of my thoughts and inquiry." We might add "only loose links," for he was a searcher and inquirer and never hesitated to express himself differently when he changed his views. Accordingly, the three volumes of the cycle represent three stages in his thought as he himself tells us in the same preface. The essays in the first volume to which the title *Dibré Hazon* (Words of Vision) is given, in which Hassidism is glorified and the beauty of religiosity is admired, were written in his youth, when according to his statement, he was permeated by a poetic feeling which craved for expression, and he found the religious garb suitable for that expression. It is not religion as such which appealed to him even then, but its poetic aspect. Later, he further tells us, he became convinced that the excessive spirituality of the Jews endangers their continued existence in a modern world, and he demanded a transvaluation of Jewish values, the dethroning of spirituality and religion in Jewish life and a closer relation to life and its material and natural forces. These views are expressed in the essays of the second volume which bears the title *Shinui Erekin* (Transvaluation of Values). In these essays, great emphasis is laid on the individual—on his emancipation from the burden of tradition and subjection to the group. Again, a change occurred in his views as he tells us, "I reconsidered my views and reflected that after all there is no individual who does not belong to a group; no family which makes its way in life without a parcel of land on which it dwells, and no people without a country; I, therefore, began to doubt the possibility of the existence of the Jews in exile and to advocate the necessity of uniting the people once more with its former land, though I hardly felt a personal affinity with the leaders of the Zionist move-

ment." Hence the essays in the third volume entitled *Am we-Erez* (People and Land). We have thus a brief outline by the author himself of his views and thoughts in three successive periods of his life. Yet, in spite of the apparent successiveness and distinctness which the writer himself attributes to these three groups of essays, there is in reality a substratum uniting them all, for these stages in his attitude to life and to Jewish problems of which he speaks are not real stages but phases. They really did not succeed each other but often dwelt side by side and were intermingled with one another. It was mainly a matter of predominance and emphasis. At one moment one phase clamored for expression and at another, the other. That substratum is the personality of Berdichewski in which man and Jew, past and present, spirituality and the allurements of life struggled for mastery and were never reconciled. The substratum will become more evident by a more detailed survey of the content.

In the very group of essays in which the religiosity of Ḥassidism and the mysticism of Judaism is glorified, there are already embedded the kernels of his rebellion against Jewish tradition and spirituality. It is not Ḥassidism and mysticism as forms of expression of the Jewish religious genius which the writer admires, but their revolutionary spirit, their revolt against static Orthodoxy, against the law and its narrowing of life. Mysticism and Ḥassidism to him are dynamic, expressions of constant striving of the spirit to greater heights. He finds three degrees in Ḥassidism, enthusiasm, communion, and holiness. Enthusiasm raises the intensity of feeling and gives man the impetus to rise; the desire to communicate with God, the source of the world, brings man in harmony with the world as a whole; and holiness purifies his own personality and elevates even the material and corporeal. We can see that this was more of a personal idealization of Ḥassidism than a representation of what it actually was in life, though some fragmentary ideas of this type are scattered in its literature. In fact, Berdichewski himself later saw Ḥassidism in a more realistic light,¹¹ but at the time he saw it in this fashion. He further finds in it an inclination to individualism and an appreciation of nature, for the Ḥassidic saints are always represented as seeking seclusion from the masses and communion with nature. The subsequent essays of this group are the mere musings of a soul searching after truth and wondering at perplexities in life, such as the pluralism in the human personality, the

¹¹ See his essay in Cycle III, Vol. II, *le-Bikoret ha-Kabbala we-ha-Ḥassidut*.

struggle in nature, the striving of man towards higher things and his inevitable fall, and similar riddles in life and the world. The underlying substratum of these essays is the restlessness of the writer, the desire for change which at the time he found in Hassidism. This apotheosis of the dynamic tendency of the spirit, the harping on the ability of man to rise to heights finds its counterpart or possibly stems from the secret opposition which the essayist entertained to Jewish tradition and its staticity as expressed in the complex of laws and to the whole burden of the past. This opposition was soon to break out in open rebellion. When the essayist turned from his own personality to Jewish life, the gap between his own views and those of the standardized tradition was revealed to him in all its appalling depth and he began to demand changes in that life in a series of essays which bears the title *Transvaluation of Values*. He became the great rebel in Hebrew literature. It is another phase in the expression of his personality, but there are obvious also lines of unity between the former and the latter phases. He was dynamic, continually striving and restless. He merely turned from religion to life, from idealism to reality. It goes without saying that this veering involved also a change in attitude towards spirituality.

Berdichewski was the complete rebel and he revolted against all aspects of Jewish life. He was not satisfied with partial reforms but sought a fundamental change in Jewish life. He saw the Jewish problem of adjustment as not only grave but as threatening the very existence of the Jewish people. The problem to him, as he phrased it in one of his essays, *Lihyot O-la-Hadol* (To Be Or Not To Be), was, "Will the Jews continue to exist as a people or disappear?" He argued that there can be no continuation of existence unless all old Jewish values are changed. He, therefore, launched continual attacks on the immersion of the Jews in the Book, their concentration on the spirit, their slavery to a system of laws, their narrowness of view and seclusion from European culture and finally on the subjection of the individual to the pattern of life of the group. In short, he opposed all the values which we usually subsume under the general name of Judaism. He demanded a deep interest in life in all its phases, a close contact with nature, development of a sense of beauty, freedom from the past and concern with things material and current variety of life and thought, emancipation of the individual from the pattern of the group and his right to rebel and secede. In short, all changes which would enunciate

and emphasize the primacy of the living Jewish group against a static abstract Judaism. To use his own words, "It would remove the center of attention in the soul of the modern Jews from Judaism to the Jewish group and would change them from Jews, swayed by abstractions and hemmed in by a static past, to Hebraic Jews living in a dynamic present."¹²

Berdichevski, as noted, was a thinker and poet but no philosopher. It would therefore be vain to look in his essays for a systematic justification of such fundamental changes in the life of a people as manifold as the Jews, or even for a definition of the essence of Jewish nationalism or the national spirit by the sharing of which this multitude of Hebraic Jews in the world might consider themselves as a unity, if they were to break with the past and absorb themselves in all phases of humanism. He does make one abortive attempt to supply such a unifying agent. In his essay, *'Al ha-Razon* (On the Will), influenced by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he asserts that the national will is, using a Talmudic metaphor, the Angel who presides over the destinies of the nation and welds the individuals of that group into one whole.¹³ He adds in good Schopenhauerean style that Will is also the God of the world and is the source of its manifold phenomena and realities. This is not the place to examine this doctrine nor is it necessary, for the writer himself hardly applies the theory to the problem in hand, but as usual merely hints at such a solution. We will only point out its fundamental weakness. If will is the sole unifying agent of a people, the existence of the Jews in the modern world is not endangered at all, nor are the changes he advocates necessary, for the great masses of Jews willingly continue to exist in more or less subjection to the past and do not feel themselves in bondage. The fact is that neither our rebellious author, nor those like him, ever represented the people or large groups of it, but merely expressed their own wishes and will for change.

However, though our writer was no philosopher, he still felt it necessary to offer at least some justification of an historical character for the break with the past or rather for the desirability of such a parting. For this purpose he attempts to develop a kind of philosophy of Jewish history though a very fragmentary one. In a number of essays centering primarily around a criticism of the writings of Aḥad ha-'Am who

¹² Cycle II, Vol. II, p. 26.

¹³ Cycle II, Vol. I, pp. 57-58.

attempted to formulate a theory of the revival of both Judaism and the Jewish people on the basis of historical development and the essential characteristics of the Jewish spirit, Berdichewski advances the following views. There was never any complete unity in spiritual matters in Israel; there was always variance. There is no common Judaism in all generations, for "Israel and the Torah are not one." There was struggle on the part of the people in the early period against a systematized Torah which was more the product of individuals than of the spirit of the whole people. In short, there was really no gradual development of spirituality in Israel, only sporadic revelations. If these expressions of spirituality were ultimately accepted by the large majority of the people, it was more a matter of special circumstances than a manifestation of their spirit. In fact, he argues, that during the time of the First Commonwealth, the most original period of Jewish history, the Jews constantly relapsed into idol worship, and the prophets of Baal were more popular than the true prophets, while the kings, representing the secular power, always struggled against the prophets. Even during the Second Commonwealth, there were always rebels, the Hellenists, the Sadducees, and others. He, of course, sympathizes with all these rebels and regrets their defeat exceedingly; he even prefers the stern Shammai to Hillel who taught meekness and spirituality. The writer disregards the long period of exile entirely, for he contends that at the time of the dispersion the Jewish tradition was already complete and dominated the life of both the people and the individual, and therefore there was no longer a creative present but merely an extended past.

He next endeavors to disintegrate the two fundamental expressions of the Jewish spirit, monotheism and ethics, by showing different conceptions of the two at different times and by different representatives. Consequently, he asserts that there are no fundamental manifestations of the Jewish spirit which are permanent. The result of all this work of apparent destruction is that there is no unified Jewish spirit and there was none even in the past. It should, therefore, be easy to break with the type of Judaism which became dominant by mere chance through unusual circumstances, primarily those of the exile, and begin a new period in Jewish history wherein humanism will prevail and the individual will be emancipated from the shackles imposed by the past and by the pattern of the group.

These, in brief, are the revolutionary ideas of this rebel, who in a group of essays, scattered through several books—including even the

first part of the third cycle which deals with the same questions—undertook to demolish a grand spiritual edifice more than three millennia old. However, this rebellion was more symptomatic of the mental restlessness of the writer and of a few other younger literati at the time than formidable. This apparent philosophy of history is so fragmentary and the arguments adduced by the essayist so loose and based mainly on single instances or isolated statements, that it need not be taken seriously. Besides, there is nothing positive in all these passionate outbursts, for nowhere is there an attempt made to explain how and by what means revival of the Jewish people in dispersion can be effected, if there is nothing stable in Judaism and every individual is given free rein to interpret the Jewish spirit in the manner he prefers.

The spirit of extreme rebellion, of revolutionary storm and stress, did not last long. The calmer phase of Berdichewski's nature began to be dominant, and the Jewish heritage in which he was so deeply steeped began to assert itself. He then took to writing essays of a more publicistic nature in which he commented on the problems of the day. In these essays, like many of the writers of the time, he championed the need for transplanting the Jewish people back to its ancient soil, but he introduced a note of his own in the discussion of the problem of Zionism. While most of the publicists of the day continually emphasized the needs of the nation as a whole and demanded the subjection of personal interests to those of the nation, thus making the Zionist movement a mass movement, our essayist demanded the reverse. Zionism, according to him, should become individualized. Those that follow it should make this ideal a means for the perfection of their own souls and their own life should be ordered accordingly. The progress of the group, he asserted, depends entirely on the progress of the individuals composing it, and its civilization is only the sum total of that of its members.

The essays included in the second and third parts of the third cycle—those of the first part belong to the stormy period of his literary activity—were written during the last ten years of the writer's life and reflect, on the whole, a spirit subdued by the vicissitudes in life and dreams unrealized. In fact, we can hardly call them essays for they are primarily either semi-poetic musings or notes and remarks, mostly of a critical nature, upon ideas contained in lengthy quotations from a motley of books, or fragmentary reflections upon life and the destiny of man. In the critical essays, there is, on the whole, a reassertion of the

old tendency toward emphasizing the rift between legal Judaism and life, but in a mild form. The leading motives of the reflective essays are life and man. Despite the emphasis Berdichewski laid upon life in everything he wrote, it was still a riddle to him. He was always perplexed by the multiplicity of its phases, by the struggle going on in it, and by the secret force which seems to influence it. It is reflections on these matters which form the subjects of a number of short essays. The glorification of man, his strength and weakness, his aspirations and failures, his relation to the universe and to God, his freedom and subjection—all these are his themes. It is in vain to look for a complete thought or an encompassing view, for the author was incapable of that. Likewise, there is no consistency; at one time action is glorified as the essence of human life, and at another time, spiritual soaring and poetic creation. On the whole, emphasis is laid on the inner life of man, on man as the creator of his own destiny. These are eddies of thought rather than currents, yet there are some flashes which are illuminating. There is also a group of essays denominated *Horeb* (another name for Mount Sinai), which points out the humanistic ideas and thoughts embodied in many Agadic passages. It is distinguished by a poetic glow, by a spirit of human love, and by a deep religious note. This group of brief essays is probably one of the best contributions the writer made to Hebrew literature. In them he atoned partially for the harsh judgments he pronounced against Judaism.

The traits manifested in the essays hitherto surveyed are also in evidence in Berdichewski's literary criticism but in a lesser degree. He is not as fragmentary as in the former essays, but develops more complete thoughts and views on literature and offers illuminating characterizations of leading writers. His style is clear and often tinged with humor and at times even with biting irony. He, of course, is no interpreter of the ideas or views of others, but is primarily subjective and critical. His criticism, however, is not of the embrative analytical type but deals, as do most of his essays, with selected and particular details.

Of the three parts which comprise the cycle of literary criticism, the first two are of real value. Of these, the first contains essays on problems of the Hebrew literature of the day, on general aspects of literature and on style. His views are, on the whole, very sound. He believes that the best type of belles-lettres is the one which combines both realism and romanticism in harmonious proportion, for life has both, external and inner phases. The novelist or the poet must therefore

view life in its totality. As he himself possessed a poetic soul, he was, of course, interested in poetry and his essays on that subject are his best. With his usual enthusiasm he speaks of that expression of the human genius in glowing terms. The poet is to him the real creator of life. He always finds new phases in it and new nuances, especially of the sorrowful type. He does not copy life, but on the contrary, presents its phenomena as reflected in his own soul in a new light and order. He is subjective but his sympathy is so embracing that he penetrates into the souls of others and brings forth feelings hidden there. The poet though subjective in manner thus becomes the interpreter of the world and life.

This fine combination of personality and general interest in life is the principal demand which he makes of the leading writers in the short characterizations which comprise the second part of the cycle. As usual, he is not objective and judges the writers in accordance with his own canon. Those who dared to differ and rebel against accepted patterns are near to him, and consequently he sees in their work an expression of personality. Those, on the other hand, whose generality and wide scope offers no distinction, no individuality, he condemns severely. In these essays he displays great mastery of humor and irony in a measure hardly met with in other critics, not even in Frishman. Curiously enough he demands completeness and definiteness from other writers, qualities in which he himself was woefully deficient.

The style of Berdichewski has a peculiar charm in spite of its grave shortcomings. It is often verbose, and it lacks, in the larger part of his essays, clearness, but it does possess a poetic quality. In general, it has a distinct flavor, for it is very close to that of Agada and the pietistic literature in which, despite his rebellion against the Jewish past, he was deeply immersed.

Judging his literary contribution as an essayist, we can say that aside from his essays in literary criticism which are of value, its permanent value is not great. In their time his outbursts created a stir and acted as a stimulant to thought, but their importance faded with time. Yet, scattered through his numerous writings are many sparks of illuminating thoughts. For these we may remember him, for it was said long ago, "Both whole tablets and fragments of tablets lie side by side in the sacred ark."¹⁴ His large collection of Jewish legends, so magnificently retold, will, however, remain his chief contribution.

¹⁴ Talmud Babli, Baba Batra, 14b.

ii. In the early years of the present century, at the time when the stormy spirit of Berdichewski had begun to calm down, there arose another essayist who exhibited a similar rebellious spirit and who presented the Jewish problem of adjustment in a similar though in a more negative manner. That man was Saul Hurwitz (1862-1922). In fact, he was no novice in the publicistic literature of the period, for he made his debut in the early eighties of the last century by publishing a number of articles in the *ha-Meliz* of those days and in the last volumes of the *ha-Shahar*. But in his youth he sang a different song. Like many of the writers of the eighties he advocated the national idea, condemned assimilation and the Haskalah, and demanded a return to the pure Jewish spirit denouncing cultural imitation as dangerous. He even criticized Maimonides severely for following the strange ideas of Greek philosophers.

For a time he abandoned Hebrew literature, and when he returned he was a metamorphosed man. His old faith was gone and doubt had entered his heart; sad thoughts assailed him as to the possibility of the continuance of the separate existence of Jewry in the midst of a flourishing European civilization which exerts strong influence upon its individual members. He expressed his thoughts and doubts in an article entitled *le-Sha'alat Kiyyum ha-Yahadut* (On the Question of the Continued Existence of Judaism), which was published in the monthly, *ha-Shiloah*, in 1904, and which fell like a bombshell into the nationalist camp.

Its arguments are briefly as follows. Present day Judaism cannot satisfy the modern Jews who are steeped in European culture and ideas and are estranged from the life of the ghetto, from the Jewish religion, and from typically Jewish ideas. They must seek a *raison d'être* for continuing to live as Jews and not assimilating themselves completely. The writer examines previous answers given to this question during the nineteenth century and finds them wanting. He is not satisfied with the Mendelssohnian answer, which says that since Christianity is opposed to modern science and philosophy in no less degree than Judaism, there is, consequently, no advantage in changing religions; nor does he find the moral argument that it is not ethical for one to desert his people, due to external pressure, convincing; nor does he believe in the Jewish mission as advanced by the leaders of the Reform movement. Not even the later-day nationalism, which asserts that a natural desire exists in the hearts of the members of a group to preserve

that group in its integrity, can, in his view, serve as a *raison d'être* for the modern Jew. For, argues our author, if that feeling is so strong, why then do the Zionists spend so much effort in rebuilding Palestine? Why do they not rely on that natural feeling to maintain the Jew as a nation forever? Besides, asks he, why have other nations disappeared? Did they not possess a national feeling? There remains then one solution to the problem, namely, cultural Zionism—political Zionism does not come into the question for only a small part of the Jews can settle in Palestine—which claims that we can rehabilitate the Jewish spirit and develop it to perfection so that Judaism may once more become a creative factor in the culture of humanity. Hurwitz thus concentrates his heavy artillery upon the demolishing of this dream. Such a solution, says he, would be acceptable provided there were such a thing as a unified Jewish spirit with set characteristics. Here he lets loose his arguments against the view, propounded by *Aḥad ha-Am*, that there is unity in Judaism. The arguments are similar to those of Berdichewski and need not be repeated. The conclusion is that Judaism has always been in a state of flux and that whatever fixity Jewish life does possess is a result of external circumstances. The situations changed, and the question of the continued existence of the Jewish people looms therefore in its full ominousness. Hurwitz offers no solution but merely presents the question in its full gravity. In the subsequent essays which are mostly replies to critics who attacked him severely, he adds little new; he merely paints the spiritual Jewish situation in blacker colors. In one of such essays, he asserts with vehemence that the people have ceased to believe in a metaphysical entity, or in the divine origin of the Torah, that they do not follow the laws, and that consequently the old type of Judaism cannot continue to serve as a *raison d'être* for continued existence. It is, of course, curious to note that such statements were made at a time when at least two-thirds of the seven million Jews who resided in the Czarist Russian Empire alone still clung tenaciously to the old type of Judaism and lived a complete Jewish life, even though some changes had been introduced, and in addition there were millions of orthodox Jews outside the Empire. Yet Hurwitz gave vent to his own sentiments in the name of the people.

As was indicated, the essayist did not draw any conclusions of a practical nature. Total assimilation would have been a natural suggestion in view of his attitude, but he was too much steeped in the Jewish past and learning to offer such a solution. He satisfied himself

by merely demanding that the scope of Judaism be widened, that divergent and rebellious opinions be allowed within its midst, a demand already made by Berdichewski. He does state in one essay that a synthesis of ideas contributing to national existence with those which conduce to the progress of humanity is necessary, but he does not designate the way toward such a synthesis.

Negation is the *forté* of Hurwitz, and therefore he devotes an essay to its defense in which he points out its importance as a stimulant of thought. He supports his theory by referring to Maimonides, whom he calls a real disciple of the prophets, inasmuch as he, like them, rebelled against accepted views and negated much of traditional import.

The value of Hurwitz's essays, like many of Berdichewski's, is that they are symptomatic of a state of mind prevalent among some of the Hebrew writers of the day and of the tragic aspect of the Jewish problem. They also exerted stimulating influence upon publicistic and essayistic literature of the time, for the arguments of Hurwitz called forth numerous replies and refutations.

Of more permanent value are several of his essays. The first is *Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi*, in which he discusses ha-Levi's philosophy and views, and the other, *ha-Haskalah we ha-Hassidut* (Haskalah and Hassidism). Of the first we will have more to say later. As for the second, it is dominated by the rigorous spirit of rationalism with which the author was permeated in the second period of his literary activity and by keen criticism of a healthy type. The essay was written as a reaction against the cult of neo-Hassidism which then prevailed in Hebrew literature. The writer bitterly assails the claims of the neo-Hassidic writers that the movement was a revolutionary one and that it introduced beauty and poetry into Jewish life; that it opposed legalism; and that Rabbinism would have brought Judaism to complete petrification had not Hassidism been born. In fine logical argument, documented by sources, he proves the baselessness of such assertions and points out the good side of Rabbinism and even justifies, to a degree, its rigor. He compares the Gaon of Wilna with the *Besht* and favors the former. There is, of course, much exaggeration in his negation of Hassidism, but on the whole, the essay contributed to a more sober estimate of the movement. He, however, remains true to his own views and concludes his essay with the remark that neither Rabbinism nor the cult of Hassidism is satisfactory and that an exit from the spiritual Galut must still be found. He never found it, for even when

he collected his essays he entitled them *Me-Ayyin u-le-On* (Whence and Whither) and was still searching for the "Whither."

40. THE NATIONAL GROUP OF ESSAYISTS

The essayists and critics hitherto dealt with were writers who, by their comprehensiveness, vigor, and productivity, exerted great influence upon the development of the literature of the period. But there were numerous other writers who likewise contributed to the manifold of that literature and enriched both its content and its form, though in a somewhat lesser degree. Of these, the first group can be characterized by a general name, nationalists, which indicates a trait common to all of them, irrespective of individual differences in talent, attitude toward life, or the quantity and quality of their productivity. This appellation is given to them because nationalism formed a fundamental element in their writings and colored all their views and judgments of the variety of questions which arose in Jewish life, including their views of literature. Yet in spite of their saturation with that idea, they never developed it in any systematic way, and it appears in their writings more as an axiom and a substratum of their consciousness than as an intellectually organized view.

The majority of this group were literati of the Haskalah period who, due to the vicissitudes in Jewish life, mainly the outbreaks against the Jews and the Czarist persecutions in the early eighties of the last century, were converted to the new view and became prophets of the new movement. But as there is really no absolute metamorphosis in personality, there remained in them enough of the old to stamp the new phase of literary activity with the impress of their former self.

i. There was only one newcomer who made his literary debut as late as 1878. That man was Eliezer Perlman, better known by his pen-name, Ben Yehudah (1858-1923). Raised like most of the Jewish youths of the time, he ultimately found his way to the Haskalah and left the *Yeshibah* in order to enter the gymnasium in Dinaburg, a leading city of White Russia. During his early student days, he was, for a time, influenced by the nihilist or socialist movement of those days but this influence was superseded by that of the nationalist movement which began to prevail in Russian literature during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-79). That brought him to the idea of Jewish nationalism, and being a man of energy and action he went to Paris and entered a medical school with the ultimate purpose of settling in Palestine. It

was during his residence in Paris that he made his entry in the field of Hebrew literature with his article in the *ha-Shahar*, entitled *Shealah Nikbadah* (An Important Question) in which he advocated clearly and briefly the return to Palestine as the only solution of the Jewish problem. A few more essays on the same subject completed the first period of his literary activity. He then, after being forced to interrupt his medical studies because of ill health, settled in Jerusalem and became the pioneer of the revival of Hebrew as a living and spoken language. He was the first to introduce Hebrew in his own home as the only medium of speech, setting an example to many. Thus the ancient language, which was for millennia only a literary medium, became what it is today in Palestine. This action alone entitles Ben Yehudah to an honorable place in the history of Hebrew literature, but he accomplished much more. The forty-odd years of his residence in Palestine were years of continuous activity. He edited and published several Hebrew weeklies, wrote a number of text books, carried on philological studies which resulted in the coining of numerous words and terms, thus enabling Hebrew to become a living language and satisfy the needs of the modern man for expression, and above all fought for the spread of Hebrew speech. He lived to see his ideal realized, for Hebrew is spoken today by the great majority of the Jews living in Palestine. His crowning work was the authorship of a comprehensive dictionary of the entire Hebrew language in twelve volumes. Of this dictionary eight volumes have thus far appeared.

The fundamental trait of Ben Yehudah's nationalist essays is their tone of certainty. Just as in his personal life he did not hesitate to undertake great deeds with little consideration of the obstacles in the way, so likewise does he display little hesitation in his attempt to solve the grave Jewish problem. He approaches the question of nationalism directly and does not attempt to prove it by philosophical or historical arguments. He turns to nationalism as a solution because it manifested its great power during the entire nineteenth century in uniting and liberating many subjected nations. He is also very brief in defining its essence. After dismissing all other theories in a few sentences, he concludes that the inner feelings of unity of the members of a group constitutes the soul of nationalism. Consequently, the Jews are a nation. Still, with all this, he continues, there is grave danger for their future existence as such, for the two factors which kept that feeling of unity in their hearts during the ages, namely religion and the hatred

of other peoples towards them have, in his view, now lost their power. Hence, there is no other way but to return to the ancient land and live once more the life of a real nation, not merely of a spiritual one. Much of the thought contained in the essay was not new. Smolenskin before him asserted the nationality of the Jews in extensive essays. But what was new was the tone of finality of the writer, the placing before the Jews one way for the future. New too was the brevity and simplicity of the language. Ben Yehudah's manner of expression was almost revolutionary in the day of verbosity and Biblical euphuism, and this is one of his contributions to the development of the literature of the period. Later writers often acknowledged their debt to him for the improvement of their Hebrew style. Yet with all this, his early nationalistic essays did not exert great influence either upon life or letters. A greater force was necessary to awaken the Jews from their slumber. Nor does the fame of Ben Yehudah rest upon these essays. His subsequent activity far overshadows the beginning of his literary career.

ii. That force spoken of above which turned the national idea into a greater power in Jewish life came, as we know, early in the eighties of the last century and caused a metamorphosis in the views of many Haskalah writers. The first and one of the leading men of the group thus changed was Moses Leib Lilienblum. That doughty champion of Haskalah and reforms in the Jewish religion whose activity during the first period of his literary career we have already described (Vol. III, Sec. 52) became the champion of nationalism. He himself, in one of his early essays of the second literary period, called *Derek Teshubah* (The Way of Return), explains how the change in him was effected. The pogroms of 1881 convinced him of the bitter truth that the Jews are considered strangers in all lands. This writer in whom the sense of the real and the inclination to practicality were always strong and whose demands for reforms in Judaism and Jewish life were always permeated by that spirit was overwhelmed by the grim reality disclosed before his eyes. It dawned upon him that all attempts to turn the unnatural life of the Diaspora into more normal channels by means of Haskalah or reforms are illusions, and that there is only one way which has a ring of reality and that is the rehabilitation of Palestine. He thus became the mouthpiece of the *Hobebé Zion* movement. He changed his views but not the essential traits of his personality and character. He always remained the sober practical observer of the solid facts of life that he had been in his earlier days. In fact, he describes himself

accurately in one of his later essays as follows: "My education and the development of my ideas came first from the Gemarah, the rational writings of Maimonides, and other intellectual writers; later I learned much from the writings of Pissarew—a Russian realist essayist—but I was never swayed by the theories of the *Zohar*, or by Ibsen, Maeterlink, Nietzsche, and the like. From all the above-mentioned teachers I learned to follow the way of plain and sound logic, not to soar on high and not to be misled by imagination."¹⁵ It is this spirit which animates his numerous essays which deal with many phases of Jewish life and letters. He knew full well that the rehabilitation of Palestine is beset with grave difficulties and obstacles and that the process of regeneration will take a long time, but the gradual colonization, small though it might be, seemed to him, a real thing while other plans seemed only visions. He likewise did not doubt Jewish nationalism and did not find it necessary to establish it by proofs for it was a fact. "After all," says he, "there are ten million Jews in the world who feel their unity."¹⁶ That is sufficient proof for the existence of a Jewish nation. As for the future, he admits that mere national feeling is not sufficient. The Jews must have a material basis and hence must colonize Palestine. Imbued by these views he turned belligerent once more and fought all tendencies for excessive spiritualization. He was the antagonist of Aḥad ha'Am who saw in Palestine a spiritual center rather than material basis for the Jewish people. Later when he joined the Herzlian Zionist movement he fought the culturists who emphasized cultural work to the neglect of practical colonization. He also wrote against Dubnow (Sec. 119) and his followers who spoke of Jewish cultural autonomy in the lands of the Diaspora. Later when Hurwitz propounded for the Jewish people the question—"To be or not to be," and sought a *raison d'être* for the future existence of Judaism, Lilienblum attacked him bitterly, saying that the existence of the Jewish people does not depend upon any mission or any philosophical or humanistic idea, for there is no particular aim for the universe as a whole. It exists and that is the fact. Moreover, in obedience to a natural law all things in the world and life struggle for existence; the Jews then are no exception. The large masses of the people, says he, realize this and are willing to suffer for their Judaism, and Jews who feel differently are emotionally defective.¹⁷

¹⁵ Collected Essays, Vol. III, p. 252.

¹⁶ Ibid., 324.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 290-305.

To these traits of personality and character we must also add that of conservatism. He was too much steeped in Judaism to be really revolutionary even in his Haskalah days. As noted (Vol. III, Sec. 52), every step in his emancipation from tradition cost him months of struggle, for observance of religious precepts was a part of his life. Hence, when he began his second literary career which concentrated upon the preservation of Jewishness rather than upon its reformation, this conservatism reasserted itself in full force. Both tendencies, the realistic and the conservative, manifested themselves to a large extent in his essays. Early in his second period of literary activity he wrote a lengthy review of Judah Leib Gordon's poems and attacked him for his exaggerations, for his failure to portray the suffering of the people, as well as for his coolness to the national ideal. Later, when the younger generation of writers began to demand the widening of the scope of Hebrew literature and the introduction of humanistic subjects, he took a practical view of literature, in that he argued that all these humanistic tendencies find full expression in European literatures with which the Jewish youth are acquainted. Hebrew literature should devote itself to the inculcation of Jewish values, the emphasis upon ethical conduct, and to the elucidation of the manifestations of the Jewish spirit through the ages. When Berdichewski and his followers began to demand a transvaluation of values, the veteran essayist defended the traditional values with vigor, and denounced the indefinite strivings of these "rebels" as pure spiritual vagaries. His realistic sense could not bear the extreme aesthetic standards of some literary critics, and he opposed them in several essays in which he insisted that, from the Jewish point of view, even love and beauty must be subjected to the spirit of morality. When Horodezki (Sec. 101) raised Ḥassidism to a cult and emphasized feeling, mystic striving, and abandon to the spirit of life at the expense of learning and an earnest attitude towards life and action, Lilienblum again took the field and in a number of essays he proved the superiority of the personality and the ideals of the Gaon of Wilna to the *Besht* and his views, the soundness of the fundamental ideas of the *Mitnagdim* (opponents of Ḥassidism) as compared with the vagaries of the Ḥassidim, and in general vindicated the rational point of view in Judaism. It must be noted that in all these defensive essays, despite the vigorous apology they contain for Rabbinic Judaism, the former champion of reforms did not entirely abandon his old views. He still insisted on the need of modifying Rabbinic

rigorism but he felt that it was no longer a problem since it was being solved by the changing life of the time.

Thus did Lilienblum react to all questions of life and letters for the thirty years embraced by his second literary period. We must admit that there was much narrowness and short-sightedness in his views and opinions but also much logic and common sense. His polemics often restrained impetuous youths from transgressing the proper bounds, and many of his instructive essays helped to restore a more healthy equilibrium in the Hebrew literature of the period, and some of them even retain a permanent value.

iii. Another well-known writer of the later epoch of the Haskalah period who became a nationalistic publicist of note was Mordecai Kahan, whose pen-name was Mordecai ben-Hillel ha-Kohen (1857–1929). He was one of the few Hebrew writers to whom literature was a labor of love rather than a profession or a pursuit. He represents the educated type of Jewish layman (*Ba'al ha-Bait*) in literature, for he was a wealthy man and for a great part of his life he carried on commercial transactions. He joined the nationalist movement at its inception and was an important factor for half a century in the activities of both the *Hovevê Zion* and political Zionism, first in Russia, and from the year 1907, in Palestine. However, during all these years he did not lose his early love for Hebrew literature; from the time of his first debut in 1873 to the end of his days he kept in close touch with its development and was a contributor—though at considerable intervals—to almost all the leading periodicals of the period. A collection of his essays was published by him in 1904, under the name *mé-Ereb 'ad Ereb* (From Evening to Evening). In 1927 and 1929 he published several volumes of reminiscences of his rich and varied life entitled *Olami* (My World).

In the preface to his collection of essays the author explains the euphuistic title by saying that the collection contains essays and articles written during the period beginning with the “evening” of the Haskalah, namely its decline, and ending with—as he then thought—the “evening” of the national movement. The articles and essays are divided into several groups. Some are primarily publicistic in nature, some deal with literary criticism, and some contain reminiscences of the writer’s public Jewish activities in the early eighties of the last century.

The publicistic articles are the product of two periods, the Haskalah

and the nationalistic. The former were published mainly in the *ha-Shahar* of Smolenskin and deal with the questions of the day, i.e., the practical solutions offered for the improvement of the Jewish situation in Russia. They possess historical value for they reflect the attitude of the intellectuals towards the Haskalah and Jewish life. Those of the nationalistic period are of minor importance.

The literary essays are devoted mainly to Smolenskin for only one essay deals with another writer, Lilienblum. Kahan was an enthusiastic admirer and close friend of Smolenskin, and his long essay, *Perez ben Moshe Smolenskin Zemano u-Sforow*, written in 1886, a few years after Smolenskin's death, was the first evaluation of this leading writer as essayist and champion of the national idea. It is not distinguished by any depth of criticism and analysis and in addition displays the influence of Smolenskin's style and manner of writing in its verbosity, ornate phrasing, and introduction of irrelevant ideas, but it contains a fair presentation of the beloved writer's views and ideas.

The group of essays containing reminiscences, entitled *mé-Ahuré ha-Pargud* (Behind the Scenes), are valuable, as they throw light on the character and activities of the Jewish leaders in the Russian capital during the early eighties of the last century, and besides contain interesting data on the life and personality of the poet, Judah Leib Gordon.

Kahan also contributed at intervals articles and essays to the *ha-Shiloah*, mainly of a publicistic nature dealing with questions of colonization in Palestine, but also several of literary character. Of the latter, *Yisrael we-Arzo be-Hazon ha-Sippurim* (Israel and His Land in the Visions of Story-Writing), is still of value. It discusses the reflection of the fate, destiny, character of the Jews, and their aspirations for national rehabilitation in a number of novels, written by both Jews and non-Jews.

iv. An important member of the group was Zalman Epstein (1860-1938). He, however, did not exert as much influence on life as his two predecessors did, and he was not a prolific writer, though he continued his literary activity during the entire period. His articles and essays are distinguished by a romantic attachment to the Jewish past, and to tradition. At first he was wary of the national idea in its modern form, and in his early articles in the *ha-Meliz*, in the year 1882, he entertained suspicions of its secularism. He claimed that Jewish nationalism was different from that of other nations. The latter is based entirely on emotion, while the former, which is expressed through religion is pri-

marily fortified by the principals of reason and ethical aspirations which are the essence of Judaism. He considered modern Jewish nationalism an imitation of such movements among other nations rather than an expression of the Jewish spirit. Later, however, he became the champion of the movement, but always stood guard over the traditional character of the ideal. This brought him into frequent polemics with the champions of new tendencies in Jewish life. He was one of the first to recognize the danger lurking in the attempt to raise Yiddish to the status of a national language. As early as 1890 he warned against such an attempt in an essay entitled *Or Matéh* (A Misleading Light) published in the *ha-Meliz* in which he argued emphatically that it is impossible for the Jews to have two national languages. Twenty years later in 1910, when the Yiddish literature had become a cult amongst certain groups of intellectuals in Eastern-European Jewry, he again sounded, and with more vigor, the danger gong. In an essay in the *ha-Shiloah* of that year he pointed out the ultimate consequences of such a tendency if it were allowed to spread, namely the complete secularization of Jewish life, its break with the past, and the removal of the Hebrew language from its historical position. His fears were not realized, but much of the truth expressed in these essays still holds good today for such tendencies are still with us. He likewise polemized against tendencies of extreme secularism in Hebrew literature, and opposed with sound logic and deep feeling those writers whose views seemed to indicate a desire to continue the existence of the Jewish people, but without Judaism.

He was not, however, averse to a revival in Jewish life by the introduction of such changes in it as would bring it closer to the general life. On the contrary, he demanded such changes, but he also insisted on the preservation of tradition and the integrity of the true Jewish spirit.

His romantic and poetic inclinations were especially expressed in a number of descriptive essays bearing the general name, *Sefer ha-Zikronot* (Book of Reminiscences), in which he depicted Jewish life of the ghetto type in bright colors and with love. A large part of his essays were collected in a volume and published in 1905.

v. To this group also belongs Moses Eisman (1848-1893), a writer whose articles and essays displayed ability and an attempt to present a systematic exposition of Jewish nationalism, its aims and destiny, but it never reached full development. He began his literary activity with a long article in the *ha-Meliz* in the year 1870 on the question of the Rab-

binical profession and its function in modern times. With the rise of the national idea he became one of its champions and endeavoured to establish it theoretically. He finds nationalism a natural expression of the human spirit but asserts that it must be guarded against degradation into chauvinism. Turning to Jewish nationalism, he considers it of the higher type because of its aspirations towards universal justice and harmony among nations. He advocates a return to Palestine as the only solution of the Jewish problem and reconciles it with the Messianic idea. When the Jews, he avers, will resettle Palestine and develop their spirit unhindered then there may arise a great leader who, through his genius, will exert influence not only on his people but on all nations and lead them towards the realization of the prophetic ideals. We can note some of the ideas of Aḥad ha'Am in embryo in these elevated but naïve thoughts of this comparatively unknown writer.

41. THE HASHILOAH GROUP

There is another group of essayists and publicists who, though they were permeated with the national spirit and concerned with the spread and development of the Zionist movement, yet were primarily interested, with few exceptions, more in the spiritual revival of the people as a living nation than in the colonization and settlement of Palestine. Their views and opinions varied; some of them were under the influence of Aḥad ha'Am, the promulgator of spiritual Zionism; some of the younger members of the group, who were saturated with Western culture, opposed him and demanded a wider scope for both Judaism and Hebrew literature, championing secularization and the introduction of new values into Jewish life. There was a trait common to all of them, emphasis upon literature as the most important means for a spiritual revival. The most comprehensive name for these writers is the *ha-Shiloah* group, as almost all of them centered around that leading Hebrew monthly founded and edited for a number of years by Aḥad ha'Am, and it is in the pages of this periodical that their views and thoughts found expression. The few who contributed little to the *ha-Shiloah* were so close in spirit to its editor that they may safely be placed in that group.

i. An important member of the group was I. H. Rabnizki (1860). He was born in Odessa and lived there for the greater part of his life until 1921 when he settled in Palestine. He thus came into close con-

tact with the leading Hebrew writers of the period and the moving spirits of the national movement, for that city was both a literary center and the seat of the leadership of the *Hobebé Zion*. His activity was thus interwoven with both. He made his literary debut, as did many writers of the day, with a number of publicistic articles published in the *ha-Meliz* during the eighties in which he discussed the questions of Jewish life, advocating agriculture as a means of solving the economic problem of the Jews in Russia. Later, he championed the colonization of Palestine and the spread of the *Hobebé Zion* movement. But he soon turned from publicistic writing and became a promoter of literature. He edited and published several annuals of high literary value, among them the *ha-Pardes* (The Garden) in the first volume of which Bialik made his debut as a poet and Aḥad ha-'Am published his early brief essays which laid the foundation of his fame as essayist and thinker. He often acted as a kind of Boswell to old writers, especially to Mendele and a guide to younger writers, such as Bialik and others. Still later, he established, together with Bialik, the Moriah Publishing Co., which for two decades published a large number of important works, especially text-books, many of which were written or edited by the publishers themselves. Rabnizki thus employed much of his literary energy and skill in a type of work which unfortunately is so little appreciated. Still his share in the selection, elaboration and editing of a large anthology of the Agada in six volumes, under the name of *Sefer ha-Agada* as well as his part-editorship of a number of volumes of poetry by the great singers of the Golden Age, are of lasting value.

These varied activities kept him from pursuing a special literary field of his own. Yet he found time to write occasional essays in the field of literary criticism. At first he wrote, jointly with Shalom Aleikem, the famous Yiddish humorist, a series of literary epistles entitled *Keburat Soferim* (The Burial of Writers) in which books are reviewed in a rather humorous way. These letters were presumably exchanged between Eldad and Medad (Biblical personages mentioned in Num. XI. 26), Shalom Aleikem taking the part of Eldad and Rabnizki that of Medad. A second series under that name was later written by Rabnizki himself. Besides these epistles, he wrote a number of essays which were later collected under the name *Dor we-Soferow* (A Generation and its Writers). The volume contains essays on Mendele, Gordon, Aḥad ha-'Am, E. L. Levinski, the Russian Yiddish poet, S. Frug, Bialik, and several others. All these writers except Gordon resided at

Odessa and were in very close touch with Rabnizki. The value of the essays lies not so much in the critical analysis of the works nor in the general appreciation of the contributions of the literati who form the subjects of discussion, but in their Boswellian character. The important contribution is the personal anecdotes and biographical data relating to the personalities and the literary portraits of the writers characterized. The essays contain the epitome of personal experiences collected during the decades of association with all these leading figures of Hebrew literature, and throw much light upon their inner life. In addition, they are replete with copious quotations which add vividness and dramatic interest to the portraits.

ii. A leading essayist and publicist of the group, but of an entirely different stamp, was Elhanan Leib Levinski (1857-1910). He undoubtedly possessed a belletristic talent and a creative imagination, as we noted above (Sec. 18) in connection with his fine Utopia, *A Journey to Palestine in the Year 2040*. He did not utilize these gifts to any great extent but he chose for himself a special field, that of the humorous essay or article, and in this field he was master. He began, as did most of the writers of the group, with the traditional type of publicistic articles in which the questions of the day are discussed in a matter of fact manner. He contributed a number of such articles to the *ha-Meliz* in the early nineties of the last century. However, he soon turned from this stereotyped species of literary activity to his special field, and began to contribute occasionally his humorous essays or feuilletons to various periodicals. We say occasionally, for he was not a professional writer; he was a shrewd merchant, though not always a successful one. Yet, in spite of that he was comparatively prolific, for Levinski was endowed with a great fund of mental energy and a mighty spirit of idealism. He was an important factor in the *Hobebé Zion* movement in its early days when it had its center in Odessa, and he was a promoter of many literary undertakings. Nor did he hesitate to state his opinions on the numerous questions and occurrences in Jewish life; as a result, we have four bulky volumes of his collected writings, the first of which containing fifty of his selected essays published in the *ha-Shiloah* is the most important. These essays and the Utopia are the literary contributions which entitle him to a place of importance in the literature of the period.

Ma'hashabot u-Ma'asim (Thoughts and Actions) is the general name of these essays, a name characteristic of their content, for they contain

reflections on Jewish life, its problems, and the destiny of the people, as well as humorous surveys of the significant events in that life during a decade and a half of momentous importance in the history of Russian Jewry in particular and world Jewry in general (1895-1910).

The philosophy of Levinski, if we may dignify his reflections by that name, bears none of the earmarks of school philosophy but belongs to that species of thought which we call common-sense philosophy. Levin-ski can be properly called the Jewish common-sense philosopher of the period. In these reflections he attempts to harmonize idealism and a healthy sense of reality which attempt is the essence of that type of philosophy, and buttresses it with simple but sound logic. His judgment of events, books, and persons is, therefore, compounded of these two elements.

Similarly distinguished is his manner of writing. There were a number of feuilletonists during the period, among them such outstanding men as Frishman and Sokolow, but even they did not attain the excellence of Levinski. Frishman was a satirist rather than a humorist, for while he is often keen and biting he lacks the sympathy essential to humor, while Sokolow devotes himself to puns and *bon mots* rather than to the humor of the situation. Besides, their feuilletons are brief and usually deal with one or two instances, while those of Levinski are embracive and contain a real survey of the events in a definite span of time.

The essence of humor consists primarily in the contradictions and incongruities which either life itself presents or the actions of men display. Jewish life, due to its abnormality, presents many such situations, and the actions of groups or of individual leaders are similarly rich in incongruities. Let us cite a few instances.

The influential Jew is haughty toward his brethren but excessively humble toward the outside world. The Jew, on the whole, is both idealistically impractical and realistically too practical, shrewd yet naïve, and possesses many contrary traits. It is all due to conditions. Nevertheless, the observer cannot help but be amused and remark at the lack of equilibrium in Jewish life.

Levinski, who was endowed with a sense for truth, genuineness, and proportion, and was blessed with the gift of humor, presents the events to his readers in a manner which causes them to smile at seeing the actions in their true light. His field of observation is wide and extensive; it includes numerous events great and small. Zionism, its Con-

gresses, its leaders and institutions, currents in Hebrew literature, Jewish education, the Rabbinical profession, teachers' salaries, the assimilated Jewish life in Western Europe, Bible criticism, and many other questions—all are scrutinized and their incongruities skillfully pointed out. He preaches, chastises, and criticizes, without bitterness and with sympathy and catholicity of understanding.

Typical and illuminating are his illustrative stories. They are, on the whole, drawn from the great fund of folk life and display the ability of the Jew to laugh at himself. Many are permeated with the keen wit of the merchant class to which the humorist belonged, and a single story often clarifies the situation more than a whole series of arguments. A typical trait of our essayist is his ability to summarize a ludicrous situation in one sentence or act. He, as a conservative and admirer of Jewish tradition, was not in sympathy with the revolutionary demands of Berdichewski for the transvaluation of Jewish values, and in one of his essays he describes a visit to this rebel in which the ludicrous phase of these demands is humorously depicted. He concludes by saying that, out of courtesy to his host and his insistence upon change in conduct, he departed through the window and not through the door. This single witticism reveals at a glance the complete futility and unreality of such demands.

There is much in these essays of the temporal, but they also possess a more permanent element, for many of these situations still exist in Jewish life, in spite of all changes, and the chastisement contained there may be applied even today with some modifications. Besides they have historical value, for the life of the period is well reflected in them.

iii. The two publicists and essayists spoken of represent to an extent the spirit of the period of transition from the Haskalah to nationalism, and that spirit is reflected in their writings. The *ha-Shiloah*, however, from its very beginning attracted a number of younger writers who were permeated wholly with the spirit of Zionism in its Herzlian or political phase, and they introduced a new note in their essays demanding complete harmonization between the general human spirit and the Jewish. One of these was Mordecai Ehrenpreis (1869). He received a Western education at the German universities and was saturated with European culture and thought. He was one of the younger Jewish intellectuals who became an ardent follower of Herzl and saw in political Zionism a great ideal worthy of deep devotion. But, like others of his group, he thought that this rehabilitation of the Jewish people should

not be limited to political restoration but should also embrace the spiritual revival of the Jews as a living nation endowed with all attributes for participation in the general cultural development of humanity. The widening of Hebrew literature to include all subjects, humanistic as well as specifically Jewish, was therefore the principal demand in the essays he published in the early volumes of the *ha-Shiloah*. He opposed the program of the editor, Aḥad ha-'Am, who limited the scope of his monthly to themes which have some relation to Jews and Judaism and he demanded a thoroughly secular national literature. He carried this view over into his literary criticism also and therefore minimized the literary accomplishments of the writers of the Haskalah unjustly.

However, in spite of his ardent devotion to Zionism and intense nationalism, Ehrenpreis' Hebrew literary activity was of short duration for he forsook it for other fields. For a time he remained loyal to the national ideal, and in an article published in the same monthly in 1912, he complained of the failure of Zionism to become a popular movement and demanded a concentration of effort in order to attain this end. Soon even this ideal ceased to interest him and he kept aloof from any national activity. It is interesting to note that this secularist who, in his Hebrew essays, appeared as the foe of all vestiges of theology in modern Hebrew literature is by profession a Rabbi, who occupied the position of Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria for a number of years and now serves in the same capacity in Sweden.

iv. A colleague and countryman of Ehrenpreis was Joshua Thon (1870-1939) who, like him, saw in Zionism a movement of complete revival of both humanistic and national character, and similarly demanded a widening of the scope of Hebrew literature. Unlike him, however, he for the greater part of his life was an important factor in the movement, and though not a prolific writer, wrote a number of valuable essays which were collected in a volume published in 1921.

The main themes of these essays are the various phases of Jewish nationalism and Zionism. Thon, who was philosophically minded and especially interested in sociology, aimed, as he says in his preface, to give Zionism a scientific basis and to prove in a systematic manner the necessary emergence of that movement from the entire complex of Jewish history as well as its close relation to the general history of humanity. This wide purpose he did not carry out, but his view that "Zionism is a historical necessity both for the Jews and for the world and that there is no escape from it" is the substratum of most of the essays,

though he does not establish it scientifically. He is not as extreme in his secularism as Ehrenpreis but he does believe that the aim of Zionism is to turn the Jewish people into a complete nation, possessing a culture in agreement with the general concept of this term, and consequently, as said, he also demands a widening of the scope of Hebrew literature. Still he is far from breaking with the past and in one of his essays he condemns Berdichewski severely for his destructive tendency. To Thon, Zionism is not a new ideal in Jewish life, but only an expression in accordance with the principles of historical development, of the nationalism which is the very essence of Judaism. The Jews, says he, were always a nation but during the Mediaeval period their nationalism was expressed in a narrower and more subdued form because nationalism in general had not assumed the form which it did in the nineteenth century. In fact, he argues that the Jews always possessed the principal characteristics of a nation, namely a land, a language, and a government, though in a modified form. Throughout the ages, the Jew had a definite relation to his historical land and it was always a factor in his life. Again, Hebrew, though not spoken, was the vehicle for the literary expression of the nation. As for government, though it is true that Jewish government was actually limited to the communities and partial judicial autonomy, there was always the striving towards a complete government, the desire to re-establish a political state. Zionism is only the modern consequence of this age-long striving. It arose from the desire for freedom and national honor.

He is quite conscious of the somewhat ethereal character of this nationalism, which is based mainly on feeling and emotion, but he contends that in social life, emotion is more powerful than reason, and that the real essence of nationalism is the aggregate conscientiousness of the people or its soul. He admits that it is difficult to define that soul, but, says he, if one were to ask for its manifestation he can point to all the spiritual creations of the ages. From this point of view Thon opposes all those who inquire after the essence of Judaism, or those like Ahad ha-'Am who want to narrow it down to the ideas of pure monotheism and national morality. The essence of Judaism is all the creations of the people during their history including those of the long period of dispersion. In other words, it lies not in one field, whether religion or morality, or any other single manifestation, but in the soul of the people manifesting itself in all these phenomena. Since the Jewish people is a living organism and is subject to all the laws of development, the

"essence" assumes different forms in different periods. The elements of the past and the different expressions are there, but the combination may be different. In short, Thon asserts that just as the soul of an individual is recognized by his actions and deeds, likewise is the soul of a people known by its social deeds and activities.

These thoughts are not entirely new. They were expressed previously, wholly or partially, but Thon introduced the scientific method and the philosophical manner into his analysis, and his works, though few in number, are therefore valuable.

v. To this group also belongs Dr. S. M. Melamed (d. 1939), who in the early years of his literary activity, contributed a number of essays to the *ha-Shiloah* wherein he discussed Jewish problems from a psychological and historical-philosophical point of view. His general point of view was that of the extreme secularist, and like many of the younger essayists, he saw in Zionism a movement designed to orientate Jewish life in a new direction, the political, and turn the Jewish people from a people of the Book to one participating in all political and social movements of the world. Unlike Berdichewski he did not engage in a war on the Jewish past but merely declared by a fiat that it is time for the Jews to turn from cultural to political activity. He claimed that the Jews possess much talent for political activity as evidenced by the political geniuses they have produced, such as Lassalle and Beaconsfield, but that this talent was repressed by the Law to which they were addicted. In several essays he also attempted to develop a philosophy of Jewish history based upon the influence of the geographical position of Palestine. He claimed that the Jewish spirit succeeded in reconciling the strivings of the individual with that of the group and that it represents a harmonious combination of both intellectuality and emotion. There is much learning displayed in his essays, but the thoughts and ideas expressed there are too general and bear a tone of finality without an attempt on the part of the writer to establish them logically or by actual data, and in a scientific manner.

vi. A publicist of note who belonged to this group was Shemaryah Lewin (1867). He contributed many articles to the periodicals of the day and for a number of years wrote a monthly survey of Jewish life in the *ha-Shiloah*. He was one of the leading followers of Herzl and devoted the last two decades of his life to the propagation of Zionism among the masses of the Jewish nation. His articles deal primarily with the questions of current Jewish life, and are distinguished by a

keenness of analysis of the complicated Jewish situation and by their humorous strain. A number of them were collected into a volume entitled *be-Yemé ha-Maabar* (In Days of Transition) published in 1919. These essays deal with problems of the Zionist movement which arose out of the World War, and their value is primarily historical. Lewin's chief contribution to Jewish life was his Zionist activity as propagandist which, due to his oratorical ability, was very effective.

vii. A literary critic who displayed ability in his field, but whose development was cut short by his premature death, was Menaḥem Mendel Feitelson (1870-1912). He began his literary career in the early nineties of the last century by contributing articles to the daily, *ha-Zefirah*, but his critical sense which did not prevent criticism even of himself forced him to retire for a time from literature. When he reappeared in 1904 he was much better equipped as a critic. The fundamental criterion which he employed in his judgment of writers and their works was the extent of influence they exerted upon their environment as well as the agreement of the ideas they preached or presented with reality or life. In general, his views on literature and on life were sane and permeated with a spirit of common sense. He disliked all extremes. For this reason, though he greatly stressed the material and economic values in life, he severely criticised those writers who attempted to apply the economic interpretation to certain periods of Jewish history and pointed out the exaggeration implied in the method. From the same point of view he declares in one of his essays *Batalah we-Abodah* that the attempts of spirited writers, like S. Hurwitz (Sec. 39), J. Klausner, and others, to search for the essence of Judaism, or a *raison d'être* for the Jewish people, is futile. Peoples, he says, are never swayed by theoretical doctrines. They exist because they feel that they have to exist, and their very struggle for existence as well as their struggle for continued development and the activities connected with such efforts supplies the content of their lives. The Jews, he argues, never questioned the purpose of their existence and needed no missions as long as their lives were filled with religious activity of different kinds. It was only with the weakening of religion that a vacuum was created in the lives of many Jews and only then did they begin to preach the mission theory. When Zionism came into Jewish life, he continues, and offered to the Jews a kind of national activity, it really supplied content to that life. The difficulty with these searchers, he says, is that, while they became nationalists, they did not convert their

feelings into an active national life. Should they do so they would find that a full national life is sufficient and that there is no need to search for theoretical spiritual essences of Judaism.

Of his essays in literary criticism, the one on Mendele is the most illuminating. There he attempts to determine from the data of the writer's life and the influences of the environment as well as the character of Jewish life, during the long period of his literary activity, the fundamental traits of Mendele's artistic talent. This essay helps much towards the understanding of the literary calibre of this master of both Hebrew and Yiddish belles-lettres.

viii. Probably the most distinguished of this group of essayists was Hayyim Nahman Bialik. He was not prolific in this field, and most of his essays were not contributed to the *ha-Shiloah*, but he was one of the editors of that monthly for a number of years and was in general close to the spirit permeating that publication, namely that of spiritual Zionism. That Bialik brought to his essays the keen intuitive understanding of the Jewish spirit in all its important aspects and the complete mastery of the language, which are so brilliantly displayed in his poems, goes without saying. But he brought more than that, namely illuminating ideas and deep thought. He was no philosopher in the academic sense of the word, and logic in its formal aspect was not his forté, yet he was a distinguished thinker in his field. His is a distinct kind of thought, wherein dialectics and logical deduction play no important role, but which possesses certainty and veracity based on intuition. To this must be added his comprehensive knowledge of the entire Jewish literature. It is these qualities which make his essays valuable.

The demand that comprehensiveness and complete understanding of the expressions of the Jewish spirit should be made the guiding motive of the national revival with which the literature of the period occupied itself is the fundamental tone of all his essays. While so many of the younger writers insisted, as we have seen, on the introduction of European values into Jewish life, Bialik turned his attention to explaining the old Jewish values, by ransacking the literary treasures of the ages, and revitalizing them by giving them a modern form.

His early essays deal with the question of whether the Hebrew language can serve as a vehicle for the ramified literary expressions of modern writers and thinkers, and with the problem of coining new words and terms to convey the new concepts and meanings of modern

science and thought. Bialik opposes artificial coining, for language to him is a living organism and its extension is more a matter of growth and natural development than the arbitrary additions of new words. He, therefore, not only advises caution in coining words, to ensure that they be in harmony with the spirit of the language, but insists that the ransacking of the accumulated stock of words should precede such attempts, for perhaps new nuances and meanings can be introduced into the old words. In other words, he advocates the pouring of new wine into old bottles for he says in his figurative language, "Have we not seen that a small capital can bring much profit by successful rotation and turn-over." He thus gave an impetus to a more intense study of the language with the definite purpose of enriching it through inner growth and self-expression. He himself demonstrated the value of this method in his own writings, for Bialik was endowed with an exceptional sense of language.

This sense is displayed in a most lucid way in one of his essays called *Gilui we-Kisui be-Lashon* (The Open and the Covered in Language). It is a short essay, but it contains both a philosophy and a psychology of language. It begins with a brief discussion on the value of words, —single words—and expressions, and calls attention to their metamorphoses over periods of time. There are words, says Bialik, which today are trite on account of frequent usage, but when first uttered signified deep thought and intense feeling and exerted influence on the whole nation. Again, there are terms which still contain the very essence of a philosophic system. On the other hand, other simple words assume, at certain moments, new meaning and dignity. This characteristic is due to the relation of words to thoughts. Words are only symbols of thoughts and never express them completely. Behind speech there is the ever-wondering and ever-searching human spirit. Words are only shells, hulls for the eternal questions which man asks himself, consciously or unconsciously, questions to which he can find no answer, and hence their dynamic character and their constant rise and fall. Only the simple words used to signify the ordinary phenomena of life have a certain staticity, but those words which are symbols of deep thought and feeling are dynamic by nature. Consequently, concludes Bialik, there is a great difference between the language of prose and that of poetry. The first is static, at least on the surface, while the latter is charged with movement and is constantly metamorphosing. The poet must, therefore, be careful in his choice of

words, for it is upon the momentary nuance that their value depends. The master may endow all words with new life and glow; the inexpert may ruin the finest content by the improper garment of expression.

From language he turned to the great literary treasures in which the very essence of the Jewish spirit is embodied. One of his essays *ha-Sefer ha-Ibri* (The Hebrew Book) practically changed the attitude in literary circles towards Jewish literature. The term literature was interpreted by many writers of the period, especially the younger and the secular, to be nothing more than belles-lettres. They emphasized in their demands for revival, primarily, the development of taste and feeling. Against such a limited conception Bialik rebelled. In that essay he not only shows the narrowness of their view but also stresses its falsity. Despite all the endeavors of the critics, he argues, modern Hebrew literature with its emphasis on belles-lettres has not become part and parcel of the greater part of the Jewish people. He further points to the riches embodied in the Jewish literature of the ages which can serve as a basis for the revival of Jewish creativeness so much talked about in nationalist circles. In that essay he also develops a grand plan for a large edition of Jewish classics, beginning with the Bible and ending with works of importance of the last period of Jewish life. These classics, in their external modern form, will, claims the writer, reveal the spiritual and intellectual treasures of the nation and serve as a foundation for new creations. The plan is still a *desideratum*, but its underlying idea exerted an influence upon Hebrew letters during the last two decades.

The demand for a comprehensive understanding of the Jewish spirit and the essayist's rebellion against the ethereal culture of "song and story," is expressed very vigorously in his essay, *Halakah we-Agada*, which is one of the best in his collection. He turns his attention first to the two great currents in Jewish literature and life and shows their interrelation, as two complementary phases of the same spirit. Agada, says he, represents the thought and feeling of the nation, while Halakah is their expression in the standardized forms of life. Halakah does not oppose feeling; it merely regulates and turns it into a fruitful factor of life. With illuminating illustrations he shows how the Halakah reflects the life of the nation through the ages and how much learning and wisdom could be derived from it even in the present day if it only be properly studied and interpreted. Such words were revolu-

tionary thirty years ago, when most writers looked upon Jewish law as a burden. He continues to expand his ideas by generalizing the terms Halakah and Agada, the first to signify a definite practical way of life replete with duties and obligations, and the second, to signify feeling, sentiment, art and kindred subjects of taste. Only by joining the two can life be created. He therefore protests against the primacy of belles-lettres in the Hebrew literature of the period, as well as against the excess of mere ebullient feeling and fine phraseology in the Zionism of the day. He demands assumption of duties, obligations, and the following of definite forms of life. It is impossible to trace the influence of thought for its ways are mysterious, but the words of Bialik left an impression and helped to create a saner attitude toward the concept of literature.

In the last decade of his life, Bialik was the favorite of the Jewish people and was in great demand as lecturer and speaker. These speeches and lectures were published posthumously in two volumes entitled *Bialik she Ba'al Pe* (The Oral Bialik). They contain a number of brief essays and several longer ones primarily on literary subjects. Most noteworthy among them are those that deal with surveys of literary currents over long periods of time, or with certain fields of literature, for in such estimates he excelled. His keen eye and penetrating intuition detected the fundamental traits of the entire field. To this class belongs his essay *le-Toldot ha-Shirah ha-Ibrit ha-Hadashah* (On the History of Modern Hebrew Poetry) and his three essays on the Agada. In the former the essayist endeavors to find the cause for the very apparent lack of originality and genuine inspiration in the Hebrew poetry produced during the four centuries that elapsed from Immanuel of Rome to Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, and for the resurgence of these qualities with Luzzatto. He finds the reason for this poverty in the subjection of the poets to the difficult and complicated forms which had prevailed for a long time among the Hebrew bards who endeavored to imitate the Arabic writers. The energy spent on these forms detracted their attention from the content. When Luzzatto freed poetry from the bonds of Mediaeval meter, the spirit of Hebrew song rose to greater heights. He therefore considers Moses Hayyim Luzzatto the father of modern Hebrew poetry. The latter essays throw much light upon the nature and spirit of the Agada, especially on such phases as its relation to prophecy, its method of interpretation of the Bible and its style. His appreciations of contemporary Hebrew writers,

of which there are a considerable number, are brief—they were mostly delivered at celebrations—too general, and unanalytical. Only Mendele who was Bialik's favorite among Hebrew writers receives fuller treatment. Four essays which greatly illuminate the character of his works, his personality, and style of this master of Hebrew are devoted to him.

There are also a number of essays which deal with art, the Hebrew theatre and kindred subjects. Most of them are brief, but there is hardly one which is not penetrated by a brilliant flash of thought which reveals to the reader a new angle of the subject discussed.

However, the content of the essays is not their only merit; part of their importance must be placed to the account of their style. The style of Bialik, the essayist, is not less rich than that of Bialik, the poet. Though comparisons in such matters are generally futile, it can nevertheless be said that it excels even that of Mendele whose disciple in this regard the writer acknowledged to have been. It is not in the wealth of expression in which its chief value lies, but rather in the particular use he makes of old idiomatic terms and expressions. Bialik, whose knowledge of the entire Hebrew literature of all ages was comprehensive, employed in his own writing that style which he so ably characterized in one of his essays. He veritably put new wine in old bottles, for he revitalized numerous expressions of Midrashic and Talmudic origin and modernized them to such a degree that they convey the nuances and meanings of present day thought and feeling. This dexterous use greatly improved the style of the entire Hebrew literature during the latter part of the period, for many of the younger writers, whose knowledge of the sources was scanty, drew upon Bialik as a source for the ornamentation and decoration of their own style. Thus he popularized hundreds of Agadic and Halakic phrases which by their poetic connotation, emotional content, or beauty and precision imparted both charm and dignity to the style of other writers, and also, at times, he even aroused in them a desire to study the ancient literary treasures. This is by no means the least of the numerous contributions of Bialik to the literature of the period.

42. THE HA-OLAM GROUP

Just as the above-mentioned essayists and critics grouped themselves around the leading monthly, the *ha-Shiloah*, which served them as the medium for the expression of their literary activity, so there was another group of writers whose activity was centered around the Zionist weekly,

ha-Olam. They did not limit themselves to this particular periodical alone and contributed to other publications as well but most of their effort was devoted to this weekly.

i. The first of these essayists is Alter Druyanow (1880-1938). He was the editor of the *ha-Olam* for five years, from 1909 to the outbreak of the War in 1914, and as one who guided the policy of the official Zionist weekly, he contributed much towards the clarification of the national view on Jewish life and problems. However, due to this very position, his activity expressed itself more in publicistic articles than in essay writing, for during the years of his editorship he wrote the weekly editorials. These were written with ability and with a keen understanding of the complicated problems of Jewish life, and at the time, exerted considerable influence upon both readers and writers. Their importance, however, is primarily historical, for they reflect both the leading events in Jewish life during the time and the attitude of the intellectual stratum in Jewry towards the problems and their proposed solutions. Yet, a number of these articles or rather brief essays possess more than historical interest, for the views and judgments expressed there are still of value to us in coping with problems which are still with us.

Valuable literary service was also performed by Druyanow by raising his periodical to a high level, encouraging writers and scholars to contribute their best to his weekly, and by searching for new talents and guiding them in their first steps on the thorny path of literature. This publicistic and editorial work did not exhaust his literary activity, for he made valuable contributions of permanent and durable value to other fields of literature, that of Jewish folk lore and humor, and also to the history of the national movement.

ii. Moses Kleinman (1877) is another leading member of this group. Like Druyanow, his predecessor in the editorship of the *ha-Olam*, his activities are primarily publicistic, for besides acting as editor for two decades, he has contributed articles on the questions of the day to the Hebrew press for a period of forty years. As he says himself, it was Zionism which called forth his literary talents and caused him to become a Hebrew writer, and consequently it is this movement and the problems connected with it which held the center of his attention during all these years of activity. However, from time to time, he strayed from the publicistic articles to those of criticism, or rather of literary appreciation. The essays on these subjects were collected by him into a vol-

ume and published in 1928 under the name *Demuyot we-Komot* (Portraits and Statures). The essays, though written at various times, are so arranged as to form a kind of unity, and the collection, as a whole, is an historical survey of the greater part of modern Hebrew literature beginning with the Haskalah period. The essays are divided into three groups, the first, called *Rishonim* (Early Writers), deals with Mapu and J. L. Gordon as well as with general surveys of Haskalah literature and types of centers of the Haskalah. The second, entitled *Emzoyyim* (Writers of the Middle Period) is devoted to the characterization of Smolenskin, Lilienblum, and Mendele. The third, *Hadashim* (Later Writers), embraces a number of articles containing appreciation of the leading writers of the national period, among them Aḥad ha-'Am and Bialik.

Kleinman is a critic of the sociological school rather than of the analytical or aesthetic type and is primarily interested in portraying the writer in relation to his environment. Hence, he devotes much space to the description of the social aspect of Jewish life as a background for the characterization of the writers. Since many of the writers were contemporaries and the essays were written at various times, there is repetition in the collection. On the whole, they are valuable and the social point of view forms a healthy corrective to the much overworked quasi-psychological method of the younger critics. They give a fine general view of the writers, their aspirations, ideals, and their influence on their time. Our essayist was also one of the first to correct erroneous views prevalent in the criticism of the period, such as the general condemnation of the Haskalah and its writers as expressing an anti-national tendency. He shows, and quite plausibly, that this was not the case, but that on the contrary, the strengthening of the national unity was one of the motives of the movement and its leaders, though they hardly knew of Zionism. He likewise points out that the value of Smolenskin as a novelist is not to be minimized in spite of his grave defects, and similarly calls attention to interesting traits hitherto overlooked in the other writers. The collection then forms an interesting historical survey from the point of view of the relation of writers to time and environment.

iii. To this group belongs also a very prolific essayist, Jacob Frankel, better known under his pen-name, Bar Tubia. He contributed numerous essays to almost all the periodicals of the time, but most frequently to the *ha-Olam*. The range of his subjects is wide and extensive. It

includes men and events in Jewish history, history of culture, philosophy, ethics, and even touches from time to time on publicistic matters and questions of the day. His pen is facile and his style flowing, and he presents his subjects in a popular and clear manner. Popularizing the knowledge he acquired in a number of fields is his chief quality, for though there is much information in his essays there is little depth and originality in them. Nor is there any attempt at a systematization of views and opinions and there are frequent contradictions in essays written at different times. There is, however, a general tendency in many of his historical essays and that is to magnify the role which the Semites in general and the Jewish people in particular played in the progress and the development of the culture of humanity. Relying often on bare suppositions and dubious historical references, Bar Tubia endeavors to show the great influence the Semitic civilization exerted on Greek science and philosophy, and likewise traces Semitic influence through later ages. Similarly, he labors painfully to show the compatibility of Judaism with modern scientific ideas and views and even to show that Judaism was the first creed to pronounce these views, though he is not unconscious of the fact that the ascription of such ideas to Judaism is forced and often far-fetched. There is a marked lack of critical analysis in his essays, for quite frequently a mere Agadic statement or the supposition of an historian served him as the basis for a sweeping conclusion.

Bar Tubia, like most of the younger writers of the day, was a follower of Zionism and believed that the rehabilitation of the land will also bring about a revival in the creative power of Judaism and turn it once more into an important factor in the spiritual development of humanity. He also shared the views prevalent in the literature of the early years of this century concerning Ḥassidism and the value of great personalities in history. Like many of the writers, he saw in the former a movement of revival in Judaism which added strength to it and assured its continuation and similarly did he emphasize the need of great personalities in Jewish life and deplored their absence.

iv. Samuel Leib Zitron (1865) is another writer of the group. Like many of the older writers of the period, he began with publicistic articles in the *ha-Meliz*, but later turned to historical and literary essays. He chose as his fields the history of the Haskalah period, the Zionist movement, and Hebrew periodicals. His essays in the first two branches

were collected into two volumes entitled *Anashim we-Soferim* (Men and Writers) and *Yozre ha-Safrut ha-Hadashah* (The Creators of Modern Hebrew Literature). The first contains essays on some of the leading personalities of the *Hobebé Zion* movement in its earlier stage as well as reminiscences of the activities of its groups in leading Jewish centers. The essays contain many data and much information which throw light upon phases of the national idea and elucidate the struggles, views, and aspirations of the pioneers of this idea which has played such an important role in Jewish life during the last sixty years. They are written with the warmth and zest of a devotee who himself participates in all these activities.

The second volume contains five essays on the leading writers of the Russian Haskalah, namely Abraham Dob Lebensohn, his son, Michal, Abraham Mapu, M. A. Günzburg and Kalman Shulman. The literary essays are not distinguished by their analytical powers nor by their critical acumen, but they are valuable because of the biographical data which they contain and the portrayal of the environment in which the writers lived and acted. He also gives an appreciation of their literary contributions in which he draws upon the views of other critics. Zitron's best essay is the one on Mapu, in which he makes the apt observation that the value of this writer lies primarily in his artistic portrayal of a finer and more beautiful Jewish life in the past which, by way of contrast with the drab life of the ghetto of his time, aroused in the hearts of his readers a longing for beauty and a desire for communion with nature. It was thus a great factor in the widening of the horizon of Jewish life at that period.

Of great value is Zitron's long series of articles in the *ha-Olam, Reshimot le-Toldot ha-'Itonut ha-Ibrit* (Notes on the History of the Hebrew Press). In this series he gives the history of the earlier periodicals, the *ha-Maggid*, *ha-Lebanon*, *ha-Zefirah*, and *ha-Meliz*. To the last, a weekly, a semi-weekly, and later a daily, the essayist devotes a large number of articles and carries its history from its inception in 1860 to the end of the century. These articles really shed light not only on the character and policies of the editors but also on the views, ideas, and attitudes of the important writers toward the leading questions of Jewish life during half a century. No less interesting are the many data scattered in the articles relating to the early literary careers of many later famous writers. It is to be regretted that the series was not com-

pleted nor collected in a volume. Zitron also wrote a volume on the history of the *Hobebé Zion* movement, which will be noted in the proper place.

v. Finally, we come to Hillel Zeitlin (1872), an essayist who belongs to no group but is in a class by himself. He resembles Berdichewski in his manner of writing, for like him, his essays are of the fragmentary type and are permeated with a poetic spirit. In fact, they form an amalgam of poetry and thought and there is hardly any boundary between them. This resemblance is only an external one, though, for these writers differ greatly. In Zeitlin, Judaism and humanism are not at war, but form an harmonious whole; nor does he want to destroy the past, but on the contrary, to make the good and beautiful in it a real factor in life. There is, however, a kind of dualism in his personality and a certain spiritual restlessness is reflected in his writings. He is both an idealist and a realist, but when these traits are analyzed, we see that their source is really one, for the fundamental tone of his character and philosophy of life is love of man and the duty of feeling and sharing the sorrow of his fellowman.

Zeitlin began his literary career with an essay in the *ha-Shiloah* on the development of the doctrines of good and evil in both general and Jewish philosophy. At the time, influenced by the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Hartman, he came to the conclusion that life is full of evil and ugliness, and that the good, the beautiful, and the ideal manifest themselves only rarely. But unlike these philosophers he does not despair; he is impelled by an inner urge to improve that life, to increase the good and the beautiful, and this says he, can be accomplished through love. He is greatly affected by poverty, sorrow, and all other ills of life, and he calls upon men with love in their hearts to actively improve conditions. This is the basic tone of all his essays and the spectacles through which he looks upon Jewish life. It also forms the basis of his criticism of Zionism, which as far as it is manifested in reality, seems to him petty and short-sighted. According to him, Zionism should aim to affect not only a political and national revival of Jewry, but a more complete one which should also include the intellectual, the moral and the aesthetic phases of life. It is this high conception which he propounds in some of his essays. He further speaks of a different type of beauty, not that which is expressed in mere harmony and proportion—though he is deeply permeated by that too, as will be

seen—but one imbued with the spirit of lofty ideals, the kind revealed in devotion to the amelioration of the suffering of fellowmen.

It is his deep sympathy for all those who bear the burden of sorrow which brings him to realism. He sees Jewish suffering, and, in spite of his striving to the sublime and the morally beautiful, he says that no one has a right to be indifferent to an action which aims to lessen that suffering, for action brings man nearer to his brethren, and hence he manifested his interest for a time in political Zionism. Hence also his opposition to Aḥad ha-Am and to Berdichewski. He agrees with the first that a small political state will not compensate the Jews for their age-long suffering, but upbraids him for neglecting to take account of the Jewish situation in the present and for his aloofness from the Zionist movement. He opposes Berdichewski with more vigor for his cult of strength and for the fact that in his complaints against the fossilization of the Jewish heart by the Book, there is not a single note of feeling for Jewish suffering.

Official Zionism, however, did not satisfy him; the pettiness and the narrowness of the views of the leaders of the parties repelled him. He also looked for the morally beautiful and did not find it at the congresses and his impressions of these gatherings embodied in several of his essays breathe an air of despondency. He speaks with enthusiasm only of Herzl. Still he condemns the excessive hero worship which his followers displayed, for no matter how important an individual may be, the people as a whole are still more important.

A number of his essays, written during the years 1912 and 1913, a time of storm and stress in the life of Russian Jewry, when the revolutionary spirit was playing havoc among Jewish youth, aim to defend spirituality and idealism. The essayist battles the materialistic spirit of the time. He attempts to show that the content of life is manifold and that idealism and aesthetics are as much human needs as are material wants. He complains of the abstractedness of the spirit of the age, the lowering of the dignity of man, the slavish subjection to an idea and especially the indifference to ethical precepts, all of which cause the leaders of the socialistic movement to sanctify the employment of means essentially immoral, for the sake of attaining the triumph of the idea. He protests vigorously against the nonchalant attitude displayed by the Russian liberal, and even radical, writers towards the pogroms and the outrages perpetrated against the Jews. There is pathos in these essays, for

the writer does not analyze the situation but at times cries with pain at seeing the moral degeneration of the age and storms against the atrophied conscience of humanity.

The poetico-philosophical essays of Zeitlin contain numerous illuminating flashes of thought, and, on the whole, express in a more poetic manner the thoughts embodied in the prosaic essays. They reveal the struggles in his soul between his striving for the eternal values and his love for his fellowmen. He thirsts for the calm beauty of nature, but simultaneously longs for the moral beauty to be found in life. He illustrates the struggle by an exquisite parable. The tall cedars and the mighty oaks rise to great heights, and their crowns are illuminated by the rays of the sun; the birds nest in their branches, and at dawn break forth in song. Beauty, calmness and might surround them. In comparison to these giants, the fruit trees are low and their branches, thin and bent under the load of their fruit. "Yet," says he, "one is filled with respect at the sight of these weaklings which carry the heavy load of sweet and luscious fruit. These trees, small in stature, are great in deeds. Real beauty, therefore, is moral beauty, and real freedom is not the power to crush people but the desire to see that others are also free." Such and similar thoughts flash through these essays.

Zeitlin also wrote a number of essays dealing with mysticism, the origin of the *Zohar* and Hassidism, which will be considered later.

43. THE PALESTINIAN GROUP

Like the Palestinian novelists or poets, most of the essayists whom we thus designate are not natives of that country, nor did they receive their literary training, or make their debut there. In fact, the more important among them had already established their reputation as writers before they settled in the new Jewish center. The appellation given to them is more a term of convenience denoting a place of common residence and literary activity during a part of their lives rather than a characterization. Still, the group as a whole have some literary traits in common, due not to the place but to the time of their literary activity. Almost all of them appeared on the scene of Hebrew literature at the turn of the last century and represented the younger literary current of the time, the more modern tendencies in essay writing and literary criticism. They were all saturated with European culture and permeated with the spirit then prevailing in European literary circles. They all had learned, though not in equal measure, from the various

literary schools, some from the Russian, and some from the German, the value of form in writing, the power of the winged word, the necessity of embodying in the essay, whether general or critical, not only logical reasoning, analysis and sound arguments, but art and emotion. The more developed state of the Hebrew language at the time of their entry into literature, its acquired elasticity, and the increased stock of words and expressions, the result of the labor of earlier writers, enabled them to improve the form and produce the newer type of essay. Their essays thus represent an amalgam in which different types of writing, the expository, the figurative, the symbolic and even the plastic join, and in which attention is given to perfection of form, often at the expense of content. As a result, there is vividness and imagination in these writings, though frequently not much instruction.

i. The oldest of these essayists is the poet, Jacob Fichman. He is a prolific prose writer; he has written text-books for schools, edited weeklies for the youth and anthologies of literature, but he is primarily a literary critic. He has written numerous essays on almost all the leading writers of modern Hebrew literature, both of the Haskalah and the succeeding periods, on certain phases of literature, and even on the poetic character of several books of the Bible. Many of his essays were written as introductions to editions of the collected works of writers and a number of them are collected in a volume published in 1919, but still more are scattered in periodicals.

In general, Fichman pays more attention to the writer than to his works. He aims primarily to give us a portrait of the literary character of the writer, and only uses his works as illustrations. He is endowed with a psychological insight which enables him to discern the fundamental traits of the writer he discusses, and to project the general and permanent lines of his personality. However, he does not lack the ability to go into a more detailed analysis of the works of the writer when it so pleases him. His essay on Abraham Mapu, in which he presents to us the chief characters drawn by that novelist in their typical delineation, testifies to that ability. On the whole, though, he is more apt in general portrayals than in detailed analysis.

The poetic strain is strong in Fichman's essays and that is their great quality, for often long passages read like poems in prose. This is especially evident in such essays which include a description of the life and environment of the writer, for the critic depicts both in a colorful manner. This strain often leads the critic into sympathetic but exag-

gerated estimates of his subjects. Frequently, titles are bestowed upon short story writers, poets, or essayists, which hardly fit them. At least half a dozen writers are crowned as the "Educators of the Generation." Taking in consideration that almost all of them were contemporaries we are somewhat puzzled at the number of "educators" that generation had.

Fichman also wrote a number of essays on types of literature, of which the *'Al ha-Targumim* (On Translations) is a typical example. In this as well as in the others, we note his penetrating insight into the very essence of literary creativeness as well as his broad understanding of literature. Unlike others who harp on originality of creation and on the individuality of a national literature, our essayist finds creation also in translation, and the translation of great works into Hebrew, a means of enriching, rather than impoverishing, the national literature. Every meeting of ideas and clash of views, in his opinion, leads to progress and expansion, and translations, if done by masters, enrich the language for they bring about the invention of new terms and forms of expression to convey the ideas, and nuances found in the original works.

Thus, Fichman, in his essays, illuminates the personalities of the masters of Hebrew literature and widens the conception of literary creativeness.

ii. A somewhat younger contemporary of Fichman is Fishel Liachower (1884), a writer who made criticism his literary expression. His numerous essays in this field deal with almost all the important writers of modern Hebrew literature and their works, and a number of them were collected in two volumes, one called *Mehkorim we-Nisyonot* (Studies and Attempts) published in 1925, and the other, *Aharonim* (The Later Writers). As the name of the collection indicates, these essays are intended not only as portrayals of the general character of the writers' works, but as embrative and detailed studies of those works. The point of view is not the psychological but the historical and the literary. He approaches the writer through a description of his environment endeavoring to relate his work to the conditions of the time, and to this he adds an analysis of the work. If the work discussed is of an historical or philosophical nature an abstract of the ideas is given. Liachower wrote his essays with a view that they serve him as a basis for the history of modern Hebrew literature which he later wrote.

The form of the essays is less dramatic than that of Fichman and less

emphasis is laid on the figurative and plastic expressions and more on clearness and precision, but there is enough of the aesthetic flavor to make them vivid and pleasant reading. There is, however, an excessive use of words and expressions which are supposed to connote essential literary characteristics, but in reality mean little. Our critic did not limit himself to Hebrew literature, but from time to time, he also made a distinguished European writer or a general literary tendency the subject of his essays.

iii. Another Palestinian essayist is Joshua Feldman Radler (1880), better known by his literary pen-name, Rabbi Binyamin. In fact, his claim to the title "Palestinian" is more valid than that of many writers of that center, for he was one of the first of Jewish literati who left the Diaspora and joined the pioneers in order to help in the rehabilitation of the ancient land.

Rabbi Binyamin belongs to those writers whose literary character defies definition and limitation for it is a combination of many elements. His essays collected in a volume entitled *'Al ha-Gebulin* (At the Boundaries) are of that fragmentary type which we noted in connection with Zeitlin and several others whose spirit roams both in the fields of thought and emotion. In fact, he possesses an affinity with Zeitlin, for like the essays of the former, those of our writer are tinged with a poetic strain and are distinguished by a constant wavering between idealism and realism. They lack, however, both the emotional intensity and the depth of reflection of the former.

The name *At the Boundaries* characterizes, to a degree, the content of the essays, for they really touch upon the boundaries of several fields. Some are devoted to literary criticism, some contain reflections of a philosophical nature, and many are of a publicistic nature dealing with the questions of the day. Rabbi Binyamin, like many of the younger writers who wanted to see in the national Jewish revival, a revival of the natural human emotions, of a closer relation to nature and art, expresses these demands in his essays. He therefore opposes Ahad ha-'Am for the abstractness of his views, for making absolute justice the highest ideal of Judaism, and especially for his insistence on a spiritualization of Zionism rather than making it a social and economic factor in the life of the people. With all his striving for art and beauty, Rabbi Binyamin possesses a healthy sense of reality and is more in search of the positive than the negative. Herzl, with his grand dream of a Jewish state, enchanted our writer and in his early essays he defends his hero against

those who at the time minimized his endeavors, on the grounds that even the very attempts at great deeds are more valuable than mere negations. And when that dream was not realized and in its place came the colonization of Palestine on a small scale in the decade before the War, our writer saw in it a healthy development. In one of his essays he writes enthusiastically and with pathos of the new myth which is growing up in Jewish life in Palestine, and pleads with the critics to allow it to grow, to strike root in the soil.

In one of his best essays, *Nabi we-Shofet* (Prophet and Judge), he delineates the ideal type of the publicist. The publicist, says he, must have the vision of a prophet, the striving towards eternal values, but he must, at the same time, not neglect the present; he must possess the calmness and the objectivity of a judge who sees things as they are. To a degree, he realized this ideal in his own essays. Unlike a number of his contemporaries, the younger writers who entertained pessimistic views about Hebrew literature, its future and its capabilities, about Zionism and its few accomplishments in those days of decline, Rabbi Binyamin is permeated with a spirit of optimism and valiantly combats the inferiority complex which made its appearance in the literature of the day. He points to accomplishments in literature and colonization; they may be small, but great things grow out of small beginnings. Great moments, says he, are rare in the history of all peoples, and still rarer in that of a people whose destiny is not its own. Imbued with the same sense of reality, he frequently counsels that endeavors be made to acquire the good will of Arabs for the common rehabilitation of the country. Unfortunately his voice was not heard.

A large number of essays deal with general literary subjects and short appreciations of great writers, such as Dante, Walt Whitman, Stewart Chamberlain, Tolstoi, and others. Some characterize Hebrew writers and their works, among them being an essay on the religious ideals of Rabbi Kook. In all these there is little originality; their value consists primarily in the fine literary form in which they are expressed. In general, the form is the greatest asset of the writer, as is that of a large number of other younger writers. The essays are written in a poetic tempo with attempts at a detailed portrayal of events, and at dramatic expression, through the use of short sentences and figurative phrases. But this form is also conducive to a lack of clearness and systemlessness of content. While many fine ideas flash through these essays, they are not presented in an orderly manner nor with logical

cogency but rather in a pathetic outburst. Often one short essay contains a conglomeration of subjects without proper transition. Yet the vividness and the poetic strain appeal to his readers.

iv. Of the numerous other essayists and publicists of Palestine, the most noted are Dr. M. Glikson (1878-1938), the editor of the daily, *ha-Areẓ*, a keen observer of events, and a man of sound judgment; Shalom Streit (1899), a critic of no mean value; Shlomeh Zemaḥ (1886), both publicist and literary critic; the poet, Jacob Koplowitz (1893), who writes on aspects of literature and art; the short story writer, Jacob Rabinowitz (1876); and Abraham Shabadron, an able publicist.

CHAPTER V

THE PERIODICALS

44. GENERAL FEATURES

In the preceding volume (Vol. III, Sec. 54), we called attention to the exceptionally important role which the periodicals played in the development of Hebrew literature during the later years of the Haskalah period. We also pointed out the conditions which imparted importance to the Hebrew press, consisting at the time of weeklies and monthlies, and enabled it to exert an influence on its readers. This importance was not diminished during the half-century under discussion because the conditions, though modified to a degree, were essentially the same, at least during the first decades of the period.

The eighties and nineties of the last century undoubtedly brought an increase in the number of Jews who knew and read Hebrew, and the knowledge of that language and literature penetrated into wider circles of Russian Jewry, for there was no longer any opposition to it. On the contrary, due to the national idea, it found favor even in the eyes of many who had hitherto looked askance at the Haskalah and its literary aspirations. Yet in spite of all these favorable circumstances, Hebrew literature was still the share of the few and not of the great masses, and its continued cultivation was not in response to popular demand, but vice versa, it was the persistent literary activity on the part of the writers and the continued propaganda of the *Hovebê Zion* for the national language which caused its spread and penetration into wider Jewish circles.

The large majority of the readers of Hebrew still consisted of men in early middle age, who were petty merchants, or people engaged in small industry, or occupying various religious or social positions, in general of men who, in their youth at the *Yeshibah*, were inoculated with the spirit of the Haskalah. There grew up, of course, a small minority of younger men who were brought up on the new literature. But these were mostly students who, on reaching manhood, turned to

other fields, and Hebrew literature occupied a very limited place in their intellectual life. Consequently, neither the former nor the latter offered a market for the sale of books, and as a result, books were still published at the expense of the authors. In fact, until 1892 there was no publishing company which engaged in the publication of books and their distribution on an organized basis. In that year, through the initiation of Aḥad ha-'Am and a few of the active leaders of the *Hovebē Zion* movement, the *Aḥiasaf* was established with a capital raised by selling shares in the company, the buyers of which considered the price paid for them more as a contribution than an investment.

Under such circumstances, the periodical was the most suitable means for the spread and development of literature. To the majority of the readers, it filled a real need, for the weekly, and a little later the daily, were still the only vehicles of information both on general matters and on events in the Jewish world. And even those who were able to satisfy the craving for news from other sources, were attracted by the Jewish aspect. The periodicals, however, were not only new devices for conveying information, but they were also organs for the discussion of literary matters and the problems which the situation of Russian Jewry in the eighties and nineties supplied in abundance. Consequently, they contributed greatly to widening the horizon of the readers and heightened their interest in literature. This interest, in its turn, increased the demand for literary productions, and thus directly and indirectly, Hebrew literature grew both in quantity and quality, for the character and the content of the periodicals themselves changed for the better, for new writers, younger talents, began to appear on the scene. These, while they made their first appearance in the existing weeklies or dailies, later became dissatisfied with their standards and ultimately founded new organs of expression of a higher calibre. To this factor must be added the constant rise and spread of the national ideal which proclaimed Hebrew as the national language and demanded its cultivation and introduction into life, especially into Jewish education, as a duty.

Attempts were made in the nineties to turn Hebrew from a written language into a spoken one, even in the Diaspora, and numerous Hebrew-speaking societies were founded in various cities in Eastern Europe. Similarly, the natural method of teaching Hebrew, called *'Ibrit be-'Ibrit* was introduced and found many followers. Such attempts, successful to a large degree, not only increased the number of

Hebrew readers but also raised numerous problems, such as the question of pedagogical methods, choice of text books, coining of new words needed for the extended scope of expression, and similar questions, all of which brought about not only variation in the content of the periodicals which reflected the more complicated phases of life, but also an increase in the number of periodicals which devoted attention to Jewish life. It thus came about that close to the turn of the last century, in 1897, a monthly was founded by Aḥad ha-'Am for the purpose of elucidating Jewish life and its problems and the destiny of the Jewish people from his point of view, that of spiritual Zionism. That monthly, which, as we will see, was of a highly literary character, exerted a tremendous influence upon the development of Hebrew literature for over twenty-five years. Again, in the first decade of the present century, when Zionism reached its high mark as a popular movement in the pre-War days, and simultaneously with it there was a constant rise in the spread of and interest in Hebrew literature, several new dailies were founded. These were called into existence partly because of a larger reading public and partly because of the differences in views and opinions of the groups of writers behind these periodicals. In addition to the dailies, several weeklies and occasionally a monthly were founded in order to give expression to various literary currents. This abundance of periodicals enriched Hebrew literature in different ways. It encouraged young writers to continue their literary activity, for the periodicals afforded the most convenient vehicle of expression, as their editors were more lenient to beginners, and even paid for contributions. It thus came about that most of the productions of outstanding Hebrew writers of the period were originally published in periodicals and the greater part of them is still scattered in these publications.

Besides these weeklies, dailies, and monthlies, there also appeared a number of important annuals or bulky miscellanies, the character of which was primarily literary and enabled writers in various branches to publish better and more lengthy productions. These, of course, had their share in the development of the literature of the period, particularly in special fields, for some were devoted to one branch only, such as belles-lettres or Jewish learning.

The World War, as we know, wrought havoc with Hebrew literature in the Diaspora, and for a time all periodicals in those lands ceased publication, and the sporadic attempts to resuscitate some of them

were not successful. The center of Hebrew literature was transferred to Palestine and there it struck root and continues to flourish for it supplies a real need to an existing reading public. Yet even there, during the decade and a half after the War, periodical publications play an important role in the continual development of literature, though in a much lesser degree than in the pre-War period in the Diaspora. Hebrew literature still needs a stimulant, and it is partly supplied by the periodicals.

From this survey of the general role and importance of the periodicals, we will pass to the characterization of the views, tendencies and literary nature of the leading organs, especially during the pre-War days.

A. DAILIES

45. *THE HA-MELIZ*

The *ha-Meliz*, which played an important role during the Haskalah period, (Vol. III, Sec. 57) exerted much, and even greater, influence during the last two decades of the last century. In fact, it was one of the leading factors both in the spread of the national movement and in the development of Hebrew literature. Zederbaum, its publisher and official editor, who was endowed with a practical and keen journalistic sense, felt the change in the pulse of Jewish life as early as the late seventies and immediately reflected the new spirit in the columns of his publication. The question of religious reforms which agitated the leading publicists during the early seventies and which was so widely discussed in the *ha-Meliz* in those years gave place to the problem of the Jewish economic situation in Russia, which became acute at that time. When the pogroms broke out in the years 1881-1882, the *ha-Meliz* immediately echoed the views and opinions of the leading publicists on the problems arising from this turn in the life of Russian Jewry. These were divided; some advocated endeavors at a readjustment of the Jewish situation in Russia proper, some championed, in response to popular demand, a wholesale emigration to the United States, while only a few voiced their opinion in favor of a settlement in Palestine. Zederbaum was for a short time inclined towards the first solution, but soon the plan for emigration to America began to prevail in the *ha-Meliz*, and immediately after that the voice of the protagonists of the national idea and Palestinian settlement also began to be heard. A group of publicists headed by Lilienblum

propagated from the columns of the *ha-Meliz* the new idea of nationalism and its corollary, a return to Palestine. The discussion about this important question aroused both the interest of the readers and the writers. The number of the first increased, and the number of the latter also was augmented for new literary talents appeared on the scene who were recruited from the ranks of the students who had turned nationalists. The result was that Zederbaum, encouraged by both the increase of subscribers and the abundance of literary material, decided to turn the *ha-Meliz* from a weekly into a semi-weekly, and it was thus issued from the year 1883.

This event improved both the material situation of the periodical and its literary quality, for the enlarged circulation which resulted from this step enabled the publisher to engage A. S. Friedberg as assistant to the poet J. L. Gordon who had acted as literary editor since 1879 and also to pay honorarium to writers, an hitherto unheard of procedure in the Hebrew press. The addition of Friedberg to the staff of the *ha-Meliz* brought innovations in its content, for this able publicist added new features, among them, essays on Jewish history and literature by leading scholars, published in a special section of the periodical. However, it also precipitated an editorial crisis, for Friedberg who was an ardent "Lover of Zion" endeavored to give more and more space to articles on the nationalist and Palestinian movement, a thing which did not please Gordon. The poet was, on the whole, cool towards the movement, for he suspected it of reactionary tendencies and compromise with the orthodox Rabbis whose power he dreaded. Still, he did not voice his opposition openly, but in his feuilletons he often satirized it, and as editor he endeavored to limit the number of articles in its favor. As a result, friction arose between him and Friedberg who was supported by Zederbaum, and Gordon resigned his office as literary editor.

The resignation of such a literary force as Gordon was undoubtedly a loss, but it proved no calamity to the *ha-Meliz* for Friedberg who was an able publicist and possessed good literary taste did his best to keep the periodical on a high level. Besides, the nationalist writers rallied to his assistance and contributed numerous articles on all Jewish questions, in fact, raised the standard of the publication. The *ha-Meliz* thereafter became a leading force in forming Jewish public opinion, for there was hardly a problem which was not elucidated in its columns. Besides the rehabilitation of Palestine, the questions of edu-

cation, literary problems, and the economic situation of Russian Jews were widely discussed. One of the recurrent literary themes which agitated the critics of the periodical was the question of Gordon's claim to the title of national poet. Lilienblum wrote in a literary miscellany a severe criticism of the collected poems of Gordon wherein he chastised him for his indifference to Jewish national aspirations. This attack called forth a lively discussion, some writers rushing to the defense of the poet, while others supported Lilienblum.

In 1885 the *ha-Meliẓ* was changed, due to the appearance of the *ha-Yom* (The Day) by Kantor, into a daily. This led to a reconciliation of Zederbaum and Gordon and the latter reentered the *ha-Meliẓ* officially as a second editor, a position which he held for three years until the end of 1888. These years were flourishing years for the journal, for the literary talents of the poet added zest and strength to it. The national policy of the *ha-Meliẓ*, however, was but slightly affected by the return of the poet. Gordon, whether impressed by the constantly gathering force of the movement, or chastised by the above-referred criticism, changed his attitude toward Palestine and at times wrote in its favor. Still, his old fear of reaction occasionally came to the fore and at opportune moments, especially in feuilletons, he broke a lance with the nationalists. He was, however, pleased to welcome secretly an ally in the person of the prolific writer, Dr. Simon Bernfeld, who opposed the *Hobebé Zion* movement openly. Bernfeld's opposition called forth a vigorous defense, and as a result, the nationalistic tendency of the *ha-Meliẓ* became prevalent again, especially because A. J. Sluzki, an active "Lover of Zion" had become a member of the staff.

Gordon's editorship greatly benefitted the daily in its literary aspect. The poet, a master of style and an expert in literary matters, acted as guide to many young writers, giving them sound advice and often rewriting their first literary attempts. He was also a lover of originality and he encouraged writers to engage in original writings rather than in translations. The competition of the *ha-Yom* also helped to raise the literary standard for Gordon sought out every talent and associated him in his work. Thus in 1888, a number of writers who later left their mark on Hebrew literature, such as M. J. Berdichewski (Sec. 16), Reuben Brainin (Sec. 38), Ben Avigdor (Sec. 12), Leon Rabinowitz, later its editor, and others, made their debut in the columns of the *ha-Meliẓ*.

In the middle of that year, the *ha-Yom* ceased publication which

fact, of course, strengthened the position of the *ha-Meliz*. However, in the same year, Gordon resigned his office again. By this time, though, the literary reputation of the Daily was well established and his resignation left but a slight impression. The following year, 1889, brought to the *ha-Meliz* literary contributions of the first magnitude, namely, those of Aḥad ha-'Am (Sec. 119) and E. L. Levinski (Sec. 40) besides many lesser lights. In addition, L. Kantor, the able editor of the defunct *ha-Yom*, assumed the editorship of the *ha-Meliz*. In the few following years until the death of Zederbaum in 1893, the *ha-Meliz* reached its height. It became the leading periodical supported, as it was, by the distinguished writers of the day with Aḥad ha-'Am at the head. The new tendency which the latter introduced into the national movement aroused both sympathy and opposition and thus lively discussions took place in the columns of the Daily. Besides, other questions came to the front, especially the question of literature and its new tendencies, the question of the widening of the scope of the Hebrew language by introducing new usages and coining new words. These brought forth new forces in the field, among them the able publicists, S. Rosenfeld and J. Klausner, the latter beginning his very prolific literary career with articles on the question of the language.

Zederbaum's success in obtaining a charter from the government in 1891 for the *Hobebé Zion* organization raised both his and the daily's prestige in the eyes of both readers and writers. This act marks the climax of this colorful periodical.

With the death of Zederbaum, there begins the period of decline. Leon Rabinowitz, who succeeded him both as publisher and editor, was primarily a man of science and did not possess the keen journalistic sense of Zederbaum. Besides, he was inclined towards conservatism and turned more to the right, opening the columns of the *ha-Meliz* to enlightened Rabbis who in their articles severely criticized the free tendencies in the national movement. Such inclinations estranged a number of leading writers, especially Aḥad ha-'Am. Yet for a time the *ha-Meliz* proceeded under its own impetus; most of the writers clung to it and new ones appeared on the scene. Such short story writers and novelists as J. Steinberg and I. H. Brenner made their debut in its columns in the middle of the nineties. Many student writers residing in countries of Western Europe, sent to it their long correspondence, thus enriching its content. Besides, the *ha-Meliz* was

the only daily to welcome Herzlian Zionism and therefore found new followers among the public and literati.

However, at the turn of the century, the real decline set in. The establishment of the monthly, *ha-Shiloah*, which afforded better opportunity for expression to writers of high calibre as well as the more frequent publication of books and annuals drew away many of the better writers from the *ha-Meliẓ*. In addition, it began to meet severe opposition from the *ha-Zefirah* whose exceptionally able editor, Naḥum Sokolow, was converted to Zionism, and thus secured the greatest popularity for his journal in Zionist circles. The *ha-Meliẓ* then began to lose ground. The competition of the new dailies, *ha-Zofeh* and *ha-Zeman* in the first years of the century, manned by able editors and writers, gave a severe blow to the old periodical, and after the October revolution of 1905, which paralyzed the entire Hebrew press for a time, the *ha-Meliẓ* never revived.

46. THE HA-ZEFIRAH

The *ha-Zefirah*, which as noted in the preceding volume, exerted slight influence during the seventies of the last century, both on account of the irregularity of its appearance and the meagerness of its content, took a new lease on life with the beginning of the eighties and became an important factor in Hebrew letters during the first three decades of the period under discussion. The reason for the new turn in the fortunes of this periodical was its brilliant and many-sided writer, Naḥum Sokolow, whose literary portrait we delineated above (Sec. 37). He became the assistant editor early in 1881 and immediately things took on new form. The new spirit was especially felt in the political editorials called *Dibre' ha-Yomim* (The Story of the Days). The editorials, which had hitherto been concocted by an inexperienced writer from excerpts from German or Russian papers, were now written by a masterful hand, a keen observer of political life, and a man conversant with the principal European languages. In addition, his style was elastic, precise, and at the same time seasoned with typical Jewish humor and ornamented with quotations from the entire Jewish literature. The column immediately drew the attention of the readers, especially those of the upper middle class, men learned in Jewish lore and also worldly to a degree. Besides the political editorial, Sokolow, for a number of years, wrote a weekly survey of

Jewish affairs under the name of *ha-Zofeh le-Bet Yisrael* (The Watchman for the House of Israel).

The contributions of Sokolow undoubtedly raised the level of *ha-Zefirah* and popularized it in the circles of the learned middle class even among the Orthodox. Still, for a time its influence on the more progressive element in Russian Jewry, and especially on the younger generation, was much less than that of the *ha-Meliz*. Jewish life and its numerous problems were reflected in it in a slower tempo than in the former periodical. Nor were the views and opinions expressed in its articles as free and outspoken as those in the *ha-Meliz*. The reasons for the more subdued tone of the *ha-Zefirah* were Slonimski's conservatism and Sokolow's indifference to the national ideal. Slonimski, who was primarily a scientist, did not possess a journalistic sense. His ideal was to teach the Jews the rudiments of the sciences, especially astronomy, geography, and mathematics. He, therefore, devoted much space to articles of popular science and almost weekly published one or two of such articles. In regard to the problems of Jewish life, he was conservative and was cautious not to anger his readers who, as said, belonged, in a large measure, to the orthodox group. Sokolow was alert, fertile, brilliant, and a keen journalist, but for half a decade, the weekly was in Slonimski's control. Besides, Sokolow himself was by nature rather inclined to follow the middle road than to take a definite stand on problems. The national movement did not attract him in the beginning. He was not completely an opponent of nationalism, for he himself advocated the fostering of that spirit among the Jews by means of a cultural revival, but he did not see the solution of the Jewish problem in the rather slow attempt at colonization in Palestine. He therefore preached improvements in communal organization, in education, and in the economic situation of the Jews, and championed the spread of general and Jewish knowledge among the masses. This cool attitude to the rehabilitation of Palestine estranged the best Hebrew writers of the day, most of whom were in the ranks of the *Hobebé Zion*, and as a result, the periodical had to fill its columns with the contributions of second-class writers.

In 1886, the *ha-Zefirah*, like the *ha-Meliz*, became a daily, a change which increased its influence in Jewish life and letters. Its scope was widened and its content became varied. Consequently, many of the writers who had hitherto made the *ha-Meliz* their headquarters began to contribute to the *ha-Zefirah* also. New forces were added to the

staff. A. S. Friedberg, formerly assistant to J. L. Gordon, joined the *ha-Zefirah* and for a number of years acted as its assistant editor. Another new member of its staff was Michael Weber (b. 1859), a writer who specialized in popular scientific articles in Hebrew which for a number of years were a permanent feature of that daily, thus continuing the old tradition but in a less technical manner. In the fields of belles-lettres and light essay, there distinguished themselves—in addition to the talented editor—J. L. Perez, who later became famous as the leading Yiddish short-story writer, D. Frishman, and H. Neimanowitz (b. 1843). The last, who made his debut in Hebrew literature in the *ha-Zefirah*, ultimately became its leading feuilletonist and for a number of years his weekly humorous review of events in Jewish life entitled *be-Rosh Homiot* (In the Market-Place) was a leading feature of the daily.

But the moving spirit of the daily, the one who gave it life, zest and character, was Sokolow, who became its editor and ultimately its owner. With the increase of the demand for literary production, he developed a remarkable fertility and became a literary dynamo supplying energy to many branches. Besides his daily, *Dibré ha-Yomim*, he wrote numerous publicistic articles, reviews of books, surveys of currents in general literature, travel impressions and essays on Jewish history and literature. To most of the readers, the *ha-Zefirah* of the late eighties and early nineties spelled Sokolow. He did not, however, change his attitude to the Palestinian experiment and remained indifferent to it. When Baron de Hirsch came forward in 1892 with his proposition for settling a large number of Russian Jews in Argentine and sent his emissaries into Russia to organize a mass emigration, a discussion arose in the Hebrew press as to whether Palestine or Argentine should be preferred as a land for immigration. The *ha-Zefirah* favored the Argentine project. This view continued to act as a barrier between it and the leading veteran *Hobebé Zion* writers; several of them never contributed to it.

With the rise of Herzlian Zionism, a change came into the *ha-Zefirah's* policy. Sokolow, at first, was sceptical of Herzl's plan for a Jewish state and wrote an article in which he expressed his doubts labelling the plan another dream and a Utopia. When Herzl was informed of the article he wrote a reply which was published in the journal, and in addition he invited Sokolow to attend the first Congress in Basel in 1897. He came there as a correspondent of his daily, but on

closer acquaintance with Herzl and the plan, he was captivated both by the personality of the leader and the grandeur of the ideal; from that time he became one of the leading forces in the movement. The change of Sokolow's attitude was immediately reflected in the *ha-Zefirah*, and thenceforth it became an important organ of the movement. The years from 1897 to 1905 were years of glory for that daily. The decline of the *ha-Meliz*, the new Zionist attitude of Sokolow, as well as his vibrant personality and illimitable energy, increased the influence of the *ha-Zefirah* and it took the place of the former journal in Jewish life and letters. Numerous writers became its contributors, and Sokolow himself developed new literary talents. When Neimanowitz died he took over his functions as weekly feuilletonist and for a number of years wrote his *mi-Shabbat le-Shabbat* (From Sabbath to Sabbath) signing it with the pseudonym *Orah le-Shabbat* (A Guest for the Sabbath). These feuilletons were masterpieces in that branch of literature, replete with wit and genuine Jewish humor. He even invaded the field of novel writing and poetry, and published poems, occasional short stories, and the first part of an historical novel, *Neuré ha-Nesher* (The Youth of the Eagle) in the columns of his daily.

In the year 1904 the *ha-Zefirah* issued a weekly supplement in which articles, stories, essays, and poems of high calibre were published. Sokolow again took the lead and participated in the weekly with contributions to all departments, even with a long popular exposition of the Kantian philosophy. The old tradition of the *ha-Zefirah* to devote a section to the popularization of the sciences was not absent even in this weekly.

In 1905 Sokolow became the secretary of the World Zionist Organization which involved his absence from Warsaw where the *ha-Zefirah* was published and for a few years his editorship was merely nominal. Of course, his absence was reflected in the character of the daily. His official connection with Zionism was likewise reflected in the journal, but in another manner. The years 1905-1906 were turbulent years in Zionism. They were years when the question of the Uganda plan agitated the leaders, and the majority of the leading Russian Zionists opposed the plan and called themselves *Zioné Zion*, while the officers of the organization, the heirs of Herzl, were inclined to favor it. The *ha-Zefirah*, though not officially favoring it, gave ample space to the views of the Ugandists and even to those of the territorialists. However, a few years later, Sokolow settled permanently in Köln and the

editorship of the *ha-Zefirah* was practically left in the hands of others, among whom Samuel Jacob Yazkan, a keen publicist and a man of considerable journalistic talent, distinguished himself. In 1912 the daily celebrated its jubilee, but only a short time afterwards the War came and all Hebrew publications ceased. An abortive attempt was made in 1927 to renew the publication of the *ha-Zefirah* but it ended in failure for it appeared only a short time, until the beginning of 1928.

47. THE HA-YOM

The two journals, described above, were the most important ones and were distinguished by their long duration and influence, but they were not the first Hebrew dailies. That honor belongs to the *ha-Yom* which was founded by Dr. J. L. Kantor (1848-1916) in 1886, and appeared only for two years, ceasing publication in August 1888.

Kantor was a graduate of the Rabbinical Institute in Wilna. Later he became a physician and still later a government Rabbi at Libau, but these occupations were avocations to him rather than vocations for literature was close to his heart and he devoted himself to it for a time. He made his debut in the *ha-Meliz* with an article written in the spirit of the seventies in which he demanded the improvement of Jewish life as well as the introduction of taste into Hebrew letters. This was followed by a number of other articles, signed by the pseudonym, *Nahum ben Ezor* from Zuski, wherein these demands were repeated. For a few years he acted as assistant to Slonimski when the *ha-Zefirah* appeared in Berlin. When the *ha-Shahar* of Smolenskin appeared he wrote poems for it, and a series of critical letters under that same pseudonym; the first, however, were of no special distinction. The letters were of greater importance for in them he carried on the battle against provincialism in the content of Hebrew letters and against the excessive Biblical euphuism of style. He then turned to Judeo-Russian journalism and for a time edited one of its leading journals.

In the middle of the eighties he came back to Hebrew literature and announced his plan of issuing a daily Hebrew paper. His purpose was, as he stated in the announcement, to publish a journal modern in spirit and European in form, which would teach the reader to appreciate literature and knowledge. His announcement startled the writers and readers for it was a daring undertaking; but Kantor kept his promises.

The *ha-Yom* was a real innovation in Hebrew journalism not only because it was a daily but because of its content and form. The editor at-

tempted to conduct it on the lines of a real European newspaper. It paid special attention to informative news; it was the first Hebrew daily which received its news directly from a telegraphic agency and not through the usual means, that is copying from the Russian newspapers. Kantor also engaged correspondents in the various Jewish centers of Western Europe and even in the United States, and these portrayed Jewish life the world over from first-hand sources. The publicistic articles, which were written in simple but dignified style, occupied only a portion of the paper, while the lower half of the journal was devoted to belles-lettres and the light essay known as the *feuilleton*, which was especially developed by the *ha-Yom*. It was primarily the province of Frishman whom Kantor engaged as his chief assistant as well as of the editor himself. Many of the *feuilletons* of the former in which he utilized his keen wit and biting satire to deride the ludicrous in Jewish life and letters were published in the *ha-Yom*.

The attitude of both Kantor and Frishman to the national movement was even more than sceptical. The excessive enthusiasm of its followers somewhat repelled these protagonists of "good taste" and this was reflected in the columns of the *ha-Yom* in frequent undignified sallies. Such remarks angered the *Hobebé Zion* and called forth opposition to the journal, which its competitors did not delay utilizing. The *ha-Yom* was, therefore, forced to cease publication after a two-year struggle. The duration of the journal was short, but its service to Hebrew letters was of value. It helped to develop good taste in writing, improvement in style, and above all introduced life, proportion, and technique into Hebrew journalism.

Besides Frishman, J. A. Triwosh, a novelist of talent, J. L. Katzenelson, and A. Rosenfeld, a writer of school text-books, who possessed a keen sense of language and was master of style, participated in the *ha-Yom* as regular contributors.

48. HA-ZOFEH

The first few years of the present century were days of glory for modern Hebrew literature. This was the time when Herzlian Zionism was in ascendancy, the movement was spreading, the important Zionist institutions were being founded, such as the Colonial Bank and the National Fund, and hope ran high in the hearts of the faithful. Along with the rise of Zionism, Hebrew literature flourished also, for the *Ahiasaf* and the *Tushiah*, the two Hebrew publishing companies, were

doing a brisk business and were producing books in considerable numbers. At that time, a group of Zionists and lovers of Hebrew thought that the time had arrived for a third Hebrew daily with a more literary tendency and improved journalistic character, and they founded the *ha-Zofeh* (The Watchman) in Warsaw in 1903, which existed for three years, until 1906. The publisher for a short time was Eliezer Friedman, and the editor, A. Ludwipol, a publicist and foreign correspondent. The *ha-Zofeh* was well edited, and the editor succeeded in attracting the best literary forces of the day, among them I. L. Perez, who, for a short time, returned to Hebrew literature and became a frequent contributor to that daily.

Special efforts, however, were made by the management to search out new talents, especially in the field of fiction and prizes were established by the daily for the best short stories. This innovation brought results and I. D. Berkowitz (Sec. 15) who soon made his mark in Hebrew short-story writing won the first prize. Several other talents of lesser importance were also discovered by this method. In this way and by well-written critical essays, the *ha-Zofeh* contributed its share towards the development of Hebrew literature. The efforts and well-aimed intentions, though, were of no avail, for the reading public was not as yet prepared to support three dailies and the sponsors of *ha-Zofeh* were forced to suspend publication at the end of 1906.

49. THE HA-ZEMAN

Simultaneously with the appearance of the *ha-Zofeh*, in 1903, Ben Zion Katz, a publicist and a writer on historical subjects, began to publish in St. Petersburg a semi-weekly, the *ha-Zeman* (The Times). Fortunately for the new arrival in the field of Hebrew journalism, the *ha-Meliz* ceased to be published in 1904, and it was thus able to take its place as a daily. It then moved to Wilna and continued its existence until some time after the War broke out, 1915. However, in 1907 it was involved in some conflict with the government and was forced to change its name to *Hed ha-Zeman* (The Echo of the Times). The *ha-Zeman*, though sympathetic to Zionism laid more stress on the problems of Jewish life in Russia. The years following the 1905 revolution were years of political activity for the Jews of that Empire. The convening of the first Duma (Parliament) and the granting of political rights to the Jews called forth deep interest on the part of the Jews in general affairs. Besides, the wave of liberalism and radicalism, which

swept through Russia at the time, wrought havoc among the Jewish youth and impeded the progress of the Zionist movement. In addition, the numerous pogroms which took place in the cities of the Ukraine instigated by the reactionary forces in their efforts to stem the tide of liberalism brought new complicated problems in Jewish life. All these phenomena caused the *ha-Zeman* to concentrate on contemporary Jewish life and its numerous questions rather than on the Zionist ideal which concerned itself primarily with the future.

It did not, however, neglect the literary aspect, and like all Hebrew journals it devoted ample space to belles-lettres with the result of calling forth new talents. Besides, its intense interest in the problems of the day brought to the front several young able publicists. To encourage the literary output the *ha-Zeman* published, for a year, a monthly by the same name, the character of which will be discussed subsequently. Abortive attempts were made in Warsaw during the years 1906-1909 to issue several other dailies such as the *ha-Yom* and the *ha-Boker* (The Morning), but they were both of short duration and of little value.

B. WEEKLIES

50. WEEKLIES OUTSIDE THE RUSSIAN JEWISH CENTER

The well developed Hebrew daily press in Russia during the two decades of our period (1886-1906) satisfied all needs of the reading public—their literary as well as their craving for information—and consequently, there was little room for weeklies. In Western countries, there was, on the whole, no reading public. The *ha-Maggid*, however, was still published at Lyck, Prussia, until 1892, when the editor, David Gordon, died. This weekly continued its Palestinian policy until the end, but its literary character in the later period was mediocre, in spite of the efforts of its able editor, and despite the fact that during the early eighties, Simon Bernfeld (Sec. 90), who later became one of the most prolific historical essayists, served as assistant to Gordon. With the cessation of the appearance of the *ha-Maggid*, Germany severed its last link with Hebrew periodical literature during the pre-War period, except for some occasional publications.

Things were different in Galicia where there was a considerable Hebrew reading public but not enough to support a daily. Weeklies, therefore, flourished there with more or less constancy, though only a few survived over a decade. To the more important belongs first the

ha-Maggid ha-Hadash, published in Cracow from 1892 to 1903 and edited by J. S. Fuchs. It was, as its name indicates, a continuation of the old *ha-Maggid* and resembled it both in policy and character. Of longer duration were the *ha-Mizpah* (The Watch Tower) and the *Maḥasiké ha-Dat* (The Supporters of Religion). The former existed for eighteen years (1904-1922) with some interruption during the War and the latter for a still longer period of thirty-five years (1879-1914). The *ha-Mizpah*, edited first by M. Kleinman and later by Simon Menaḥem Lazar, was of a fair literary character and a number of younger writers made their literary debut there. It also reflected Jewish life to a great extent. The *Maḥasiké ha-Dat*, as its name indicates, was a weekly of a polemic character founded by an orthodox group to defend that type of Judaism from the attacks of the liberals, but considerable space was also given to publicistic articles and historical essays. David Neumark, the famous Jewish philosopher, and other Galician writers made their debut in that periodical.

Among the Galician weeklies may also be counted the *ha-Shebuah* (The Week) which, though published in Vienna for a number of years (1898-1903), was intended for the Galician reading public. It was edited by Jacob Samuel Fuchs. Its literary calibre was the same as that of the *ha-Mizpah* and it served as training ground for a number of younger writers who later earned their spurs in different fields of Hebrew literature. Emphasis was laid by the editor, who was a scholar, on essays in the various fields of Jewish knowledge.

Of weeklies published in other countries there are to be noted first the *ha-Zebi* (The Glory—with reference to Palestine which is called *Ereẓ Zebi*, i.e., the Land of Glory) published in Jerusalem from 1885 to 1900. It was edited by Ben Yehudah (Sec. 40) during its entire existence, but after 1900, it changed its name to *ha-Or*. From 1908-1912 it appeared as a daily under both names. Ben Yehudah also published and edited another weekly, the *ha-Hashkafah* (The View), 1897-1908. These weeklies in their various metamorphoses distinguished themselves primarily by their propaganda for the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language which the editor championed from the first day of his settlement in Palestine, and also by the use of a considerable number of newly-coined words in the articles and short stories published in its columns. Their literary level was not very high for lack of able contributors. They were, however, used as organs of expression for beginners, some of whom later made a great name for themselves. The well-

known poet, Saul Tschernichowski, published a number of his earlier poems in the *ha-Hashkafah*.

Another weekly was the *ha-Yehudi* (The Jew), later changed to *ha-Degel* (The Flag), which appeared in London from 1898 to 1929 and was edited by Isaac Suwalski. Its main distinction is the place of its appearance and the perseverance of the editor in maintaining his organ in spite of the unfavorable environment. Its attitude was conservative and Zionist, and its literary value mediocre. However, it performed a great service for it kept alive the spark of love for that language and literature in the hearts of many immigrant *Maskilim* in their new and strange environment.

51. THE HA-DOR

The only Hebrew weekly, published in Russia before 1906 was the *Ha-Dor* (The Generation) which appeared during the year 1901 and after a two year interruption appeared for one more year in 1904. It was published by the *Ahiasaf* and edited by David Frishman. With the appearance of the *ha-Dor*, the champion of good taste in modern Hebrew literature realized a life-long ambition to edit a periodical which should serve as a model of good literature and thus train the Hebrew reading public to discern between real literary talent and mere writers. It goes without saying that in this weekly the emphasis was laid on belles-lettres and criticism more than on information on current events. Frishman, therefore, attracted the best talents of the day to his weekly, and though he was a critic by profession, he encouraged young writers, in whom he found some ability. The other phases of literature, however, were not entirely neglected; essays on subjects of Jewish knowledge or of a philosophical nature, and even publicistic articles on the problems of the day appeared from time to time. The attitude of the *ha-Dor* to Zionism was sympathetic but critical and not without a tinge of irony. This attitude, though resented by the veteran followers of the movement, was not without advantage, for the Zionist movement of the day needed to have some criticism of the weaker points in its policy, as well as of some of the untactical steps which were made by the leaders from time to time. That criticism was furnished by Frishman's weekly, and as such, it was beneficial in spite of its barbs.

The *ha-Dor* marked an event in the Hebrew periodical literature for

it raised it to a higher level, and notwithstanding its short duration, it left a considerable impression.

52. THE HA-OLAM

The most important weekly of the entire period is the *ha-Olam* (The World) founded by Naḥum Sokolow at Köln, Germany, and published in various places for over thirty years, with the exception of the interruption during the War years. It is still appearing in Jerusalem. During all these years it was an organ of expression both for the leading publicists of the generation and for writers in other fields, and as a result it has been an active factor in the development of Hebrew literature during the last three decades.

The value of its service was especially important during the last half decade of the pre-War period. The two years, 1906 and 1907 which succeeded the Russian Revolution of 1905 were lean years for Hebrew literature in that great Jewish center. The revolutionary spirit which swept over Russia at that time, had, as we noted, a vast effect upon Jewish youth who were to a very great extent carried away by it. They forsook their former ideals of Zionism and the Hebrew revival and devoted themselves to the liberation of Russia. In addition, there were numerous pogroms in those days, and as a result, the interest of the masses was turned in other directions. The development of Hebrew literature which had made considerable progress in the first half decade of the present century was therefore arrested, and the periodical press received a set-back. The *ha-Zofeh* ceased publication and the other dailies which still appeared did not function regularly. It was then that the veteran writer and journalist, Naḥum Sokolow, came to the rescue and founded the *ha-Olam* as the Hebrew organ of the World Zionist Organization, not only for the purpose of discussing Zionist problems, but also as a vehicle of expression for Hebrew culture and literature. His cry in the opening article in the first number of the weekly was "we cannot bear any more hunger" which meant the spiritual famine which reigned at the time in Jewish life. He concluded that call by the promise that the *ha-Olam* would endeavor to endow Zionism with the Hebrew spirit and would serve as the echo of all cultural strivings and aspirations.

Sokolow kept his promise for not only did he maintain the weekly on a high level from a publicistic point of view, but he gave sufficient

space to belles-lettres and also to essays on subjects of Jewish learning. The editor gathered around him the best literary talents of the day, the younger as well as the older. During Sokolow's editorship, many Jewish scholars contributed their essays to it and the *ha-Olam* served then as a rich source of Jewish learning.

At the end of 1909, the *ha-Olam* was removed to Wilna and was edited by Druyanow (Sec. 42), an able journalist and experienced publicist. His editorship extended to the outbreak of the War—the last few years the *ha-Olam* appeared in Odessa. These days were days of glory for the weekly, for besides the fact that the editor devoted all his time to his task, which was not the case with Sokolow, and was thus enabled to raise it to a high literary level, he was a master of the art of editing. He impressed the weekly with his personality and style. During these years numerous new writers made their appearance in its columns, notable among whom were M. Glickson and Hayyim Greenberg, both of whom later made their mark as publicists and leaders of Zionist parties, the first among the general Zionists, and the second among the *Poalé Zion* (The Laborites).

After the War, the *ha-Olam* appeared for some time in Berlin and then removed to London and ultimately in 1935 to Jerusalem. For a few years, it was edited by A. D. Idelsohn, an able Russian Jewish journalist who knew some Hebrew, and from 1922 until today, it has been edited by M. Kleinman (Sec. 42). Under Kleinman it has regained much of its prestige and is still a leading organ of literary expression, though it gives more space than formerly to informative and publicistic material.

C. MONTHLIES

53. *THE HASHILOAH*

The same factors which operated against the appearance of stabilized weeklies during the pre-War period, also operated and with even greater effectiveness against the publication of monthlies. During that span of time, numerous attempts were made by writers and editors to issue a literary monthly, either as a supplement to a daily or as a separate periodical, but all of them proved unsuccessful. Thus, Zederbaum began in 1885 to publish a monthly supplement to the semi-weekly *ha-Meliz* under the name of *ha-Mizpah*, but only four numbers appeared. Two years later, J. L. Kantor published and edited for a

time the *Ben-Ami*, a monthly periodical of high literary value, as a supplement to the *ha-Yom*, but it was of short duration for it ceased publication only a few months after the *ha-Yom* became defunct in the middle of 1888; the last few numbers were edited by J. L. Gordon.

Six years later (1894), Reuben Brainin established in Vienna the monthly *mi-Mizrah u-mi-Ma'arab* (East and West). As its name indicates, it was intended to be an organ for the amalgamation of the two currents in the Hebrew literature of the day, the one striving for the deepening of Jewishness and the other aspiring to introduce new cultural values in Judaism. But in spite of its grandiloquent name and the good intentions of the editor, it appeared irregularly and was of short duration. It did, however, introduce a few young talents. D. Neumark (Sec. 124), published his first philosophical essay, *Nietzsche and His Philosophy*, in one of the numbers of the periodical.

A more important and worthy attempt was the *ha-Zeman*, a monthly which first appeared in St. Petersburg in 1904 as a supplement to the semi-weekly by that name and was later issued from 1905 to 1906 in Wilna as a separate periodical. Both issues were edited by Ben Zion Katz. The literary level of the monthly was very high and one of its earlier numbers had the distinction of containing the first version of Bialik's famous poem, *In the City of Slaughter*, written after the Kishinev pogrom in 1903. It bore then, at the insistence of the censor, the title *Masa Nemirov* (Sec. 28). In the other numbers all the leading writers of the day participated, among them Perez Hirshbein, who later became a leading Yiddish dramatist, after having published his drama, *Miriam*, in that periodical.

In contrast to this series of short-lived monthlies is the *ha-Shiloah* (*Shiloah* is the name of a brook in Jerusalem; the title was adopted with reference to Isaiah, VIII, 5) distinguished both by its long duration, from 1897 to 1926, with interruption during the War, and by its exceptionally high literary quality. It was *the* monthly of the period, and its forty-six volumes of six numbers each served as a gathering place for the most talented writers in all literary branches.

It was founded with the help of the *Ahiasaf* by Ahad ha-'Am, who also served as editor of the first twelve volumes until 1903. This leading writer, who preached a Jewish revival on the lines of general humanism, believed at the time he assumed the editorship that the center of gravity of Hebrew literature lies in its endeavors to reveal to the Jew his own world in all its phases. In other words, its purpose is to unfold for its

reader the complete development of the Jewish spirit through the ages, to delineate the situation of the Jewish people, both materially and spiritually, and to demonstrate the mutual influence and the relation between the Jew and the world around him in the widest meaning of the term. As for general knowledge, he believed that this can be obtained by the Jewish youth from their reading of the literatures in other languages. To him, as to many writers of the nineties, Hebrew was to remain a literary language and not the spoken or the mother tongue of a large number of Jews as is the case in Palestine today.

In accordance with his views, he outlined the program of the monthly to include (a) essays elucidating events and phenomena in Jewish life through the ages on all subjects, religious, moral, social, and literary; (b) sound publicistic articles illuminating present day life; (c) criticism in the wide sense, both of books and of ideals and movements; and (d) belles-lettres which have a purpose and underlying thought. Poems and stories written merely for art's sake, he considered of little value.

He set out to realize his program and as a conscientious editor he lived up to it selecting from the numerous contributions which reached him only those which met his requirements. But as a conscientious editor, he also gave place to his opponents to express their views and opinions on literature and its purposes. It thus came about that in the early volumes of the *ha-Shiloah*, there developed a lively discussion between the editor and a number of younger writers who protested against Aḥad ha-'Am's limitations of the sphere of Hebrew literature and the narrowing of its scope. They demanded more art and more articles and essays on general subjects. The leading champions of a wider scope were M. J. Berdichewski, Joshua Thon, and Mordecai Ehrenpreis, whose views were noted above.

Irrespective, however, of the differences of views, the *ha-Shiloah* succeeded in obtaining the best productions of all writers, even those of the opponents, for the name of the editor was a guarantee of high literary quality and excellence of both content and style. There was hardly a leading writer who did not collaborate with him. Many of the best poems of Bialik and Tschernichowski were published in this monthly and similarly it contained numerous good stories and brilliant essays. The policy of the *ha-Shiloah* was, of course, nationalistic, but of the spiritual type and with a critical attitude towards political Zion-

ism. The criticism, however, was dignified, and on the whole, without partisan acrimony.

In 1904, with the close of the twelfth volume, Aḥad ha-'Am resigned the editorship and turned it over to J. Klausner and H. N. Bialik, the first taking charge of the publicistic and essays, and the second of the belles-lettres. The reason Aḥad ha-'Am gave for his resignation was the persistent demand made by younger writers for a monthly of a wider literary scope, namely one that would allot more space to belles-lettres and essays on general subjects. He claimed he found difficulty in obtaining literary material for the monthly even according to his program. He, therefore, turned the *ha-Shiloah* over to younger hands.

The new editors made changes. The space assigned to belles-lettres was increased to one-third of the monthly; the bars were let down, art became the criterion of stories and poems. Bialik, who was associated in the editing until the end of 1909, exercised specially good influence within his department. He employed his good taste and excellence of style in correcting and improving the creations of writers, thus raising the belles-lettres of the *ha-Shiloah* to higher levels and guiding the younger writers in their literary path. He was also on the lookout for new talent, encouraging every beginner.

Klausner, on his part, introduced new features in the publicistic and essay departments, such as a survey of general events in the world and of those in Jewish life and essays on subjects of the social sciences. The fundamental character of the *ha-Shiloah* was preserved, inasmuch as stress was still laid on the spiritual and cultural revival, and though the attitude to Zionism was modified and less critical, there was always in it an emphatic note reflecting the view of Aḥad ha-'Am. From 1910 Klausner became the sole editor, Bialik having resigned his post. There was little change in the literary quality and policy. Klausner endeavored, through all the vicissitudes which the monthly experienced and through all its changes of places—it was first edited in Warsaw, though printed in Cracow, later published and edited in Odessa and after the War removed to Jerusalem—to keep it on the literary level upon which the first editor placed it and he did so except for some modifications which the exigencies of the time necessitated.

It is inadvisable to enumerate even a part of the contributors for the list would be too long. Suffice it to say that the contents of numerous volumes on such subjects as Jewish history, philosophy, literature, re-

ligion, and Bible study or collections of poems, short stories or novels were originally published in the *ha-Shiloah* and later issued in book form. The monthly thus enriched Hebrew literature to a very great extent.

With the *ha-Shiloah*, we close our survey of the Hebrew monthlies. Those published in Palestine after the War, most of which are still appearing, are too recent to become the subject of historical judgment.

D. ANNUALS AND QUARTERLIES

54. THE HA-ASIF

Not a small part of the development of the Hebrew literature of the period and its enrichment was due to the miscellanies appearing at irregular periods, and later the few quarterlies. The first to see the value of a large annual where longer literary productions than those which could find place in the early weeklies or dailies could be published was Nahum Sokolow, and in 1885, he started his annual, the *ha-Asif* (The Gatherer). We have already noted above (Sec. 37) that the general purpose of Sokolow's literary activity in his earlier years was to supply useful knowledge, to improve the social situation of the communities, and to widen the scope of literary productivity. In accordance with these views, the program of the *ha-Asif* was arranged. It gave useful knowledge, such as chronological tables of historical events, general and Jewish, of inventions and the sciences, surveys of the year, of commerce, of the laws of the land, articles on popular medicine, the outstanding philanthropic deeds, reports of activities of leading Jewish communities, and a lengthy necrology. It then turned to literature and covered every phase of it. There were lengthy essays on Jewish literature and history, thorough-going surveys of the literature of the year, and articles on individual outstanding books, especially in the field of Jewish learning, and biographies of leading scholars. Nor were the belles-lettres neglected, for there were both poems and stories. The first annual was clumsily arranged, for it was divided into departments with separate pagination. In the succeeding volumes the defect was remedied, and the formal division into departments was abolished, though the principle was retained.

The literary value of the volumes of the *ha-Asif* of which five were published in succession from 1885 to 1889 and a sixth after an interruption of six years in 1894, was very high, according to the standards of the

time, especially in the field of Jewish learning. The ablest scholars of the time contributed essays on historical, literary, religious, and philosophical subjects, among them Isaac Hirsh Weiss, Moritz Güdemann, Abraham Elijah Harkavy, (Vol. III, Sec. 89) and others. The reviews and surveys were complete and thorough and some of the former were distinguished by their keenness. In the belles-lettres section Frishman and I. L. Perez also participated, the former contributing some of his fine sketches and feuilletons.

Among the other writers, the critic, Eleazar Atlas (1851-1904), is worthy of note. He was a typical critic and his literary activity expressed itself in uncovering the faults and deficiencies in the writings of others. His field of criticism was primarily the various branches of Jewish learning, especially the Talmudic and historical branches. In this he excelled for he was a Talmudic scholar and also possessed a fair amount of secular learning and was conversant with several European languages. Atlas was of an orthodox trend of mind and consequently exercised his keen critical sense against the Haskalah and its bearers and later against the Zionist movement both in its earlier and later phases. He was the leading critic of the *ha-Asif* annuals and contributed numerous reviews and literary surveys to the first five volumes. In 1888, he attempted to establish his own annual, the *ha-Kerem* (The Vineyard), but only one volume appeared. He lacked the power of organization and positive creativeness. In the nineties, Atlas forsook his literary activity almost entirely on account of opposition to his extreme conservative views on the part of the writers, but a few years before his death, he joined forces with the opponents of Zionism and contributed to the *ha-Peles*, an anti-Zionist monthly edited by Rabbi Akiba Rabinowitz at Poltawa.

In 1889, the *ha-Asif* published a biographical supplement entitled *Sefer Zikḥaron* (A Book of Remembrance) wherein the biographies of all the writers and scholars of the day were given. It also contains a number of autobiographies, among them a very interesting one by Mendele. It was the first attempt at a Hebrew biographical dictionary.

The appearance of the *ha-Asif*, an annual distinguished for its quantity (a volume of 700 pages) and quality, created a stir in Hebrew reading circles, and at the beginning it proved a success even from a financial point of view. According to its editor, it had sold in ten thousand copies, an unheard-of sale for a Hebrew book, even in later days outside of Palestine. However, the economic depression which

set in, in the late eighties, forced its discontinuation in 1889. The venture, though, was a daring one and gave an impetus to similar publications.

55. *THE KENESSET YISRAEL*

The success of the *ha-Asif* aroused other writers to imitation and within two years, in 1887, there was published in Warsaw another annual entitled *Keneset Yisrael* (The Assembly of Israel) and was edited by Saul Pinhas Rabinowitz (1845-1911), one of the leading figures of the *Hobebé Zion* movement, and a writer of note of historical monographs (Sec. 113). The program of the *Keneset* was similar to that of the *ha-Asif*, but it differed in its policy towards the national idea for it was strongly nationalistic. Like the *ha-Asif*, it had a part devoted to useful knowledge, but not as ramified. It gave tables of chronology, several articles on statistics, both general and Jewish, and a commercial survey. The other part which exceeded that of the *ha-Asif*, as the first volume contained over eleven hundred pages of literary matter, was divided into departments: (a) articles and surveys including necrology; (b) critical reviews; (c) Talmudic and Biblical studies; (d) poems; (e) stories; (f) survey of Jewish communal life in the leading Jewish centers; (g) biographies; (h) Palestinian survey; (i) essays on general scientific subjects; (j) publication and edition of historical works from manuscripts. This department was entitled *Orot me-Ofel* (Light from Darkness, i.e. the works hitherto hidden saw the light of publication). Such was the wealth of literary material which was included in one volume, and it was not only by its quantity that this annual was distinguished, but also by the quality of the essays, especially in the field of Jewish learning, written mostly by scholars. Of the historical articles, the most noted was the one by Wolf Yawetz, *Migdal ha-Meah* (The Tower of the Century) containing a survey, written from a conservative point of view, of a century of Haskalah, from the death of Moses Mendelssohn in 1786 to the year 1886, the activities of its leaders, effects, and results. Even the belles-lettres department was not without merit, especially the stories. In the *Keneset*, we meet for the first time sketches and short stories of the new Palestinian life written by Y. J. Levontin. There was also published there a large part of Z. Epstein's (Sec. 40) *Zikronot* (Childhood Memories).

The second volume of the *Keneset* was not as bulky as the first, but contained the same type of material and division and arrangement.

However, the reading public was not prepared for such voluminous annuals, and as a result the *Kenesset* ceased publication after the third volume. Like the *ha-Asif*, it left a rich literary deposit.

56. THE HA-PARDES AND THE LUAḤ AḤIASAF

Of the various annuals which appeared during the subsequent years in a more or less regular sequence or in a sporadic manner, the *ha-Pardes* (The Garden) and the *Luaḥ Aḥiasaf* (The Aḥiasaf Almanach) were the most important.

The first, of which there appeared four volumes, was more of a literary miscellany than an annual. It was published in Odessa during the years 1892-1896 and was edited by I. H. Rabnizki (Sec. 41). The *ha-Pardes* was quantitatively a small affair as compared to its predecessors, the *ha-Asif* and the *Kenesset*, but qualitatively high. It marked the ascendancy of the Odessa literary center which played an important role in the development of Hebrew literature during the last forty years. Among its contributors were Aḥad ha-'Am, Bialik—Bialik's first poem *El ha-Zippor* was published in the first volume of the *ha-Pardes*—Levinski (Sec. 41) who published his delightful Utopia there (Sec. 18), Mendele, who contributed his short stories to that miscellany, Lilienblum and others. Among the new writers, there was also the famous Yiddish humorist, Shalom Aleikem, who presented the editor with several short stories.

The *ha-Pardes* was primarily a literary miscellany; belles-lettres and criticism therefore occupied the larger part of its content. Place, however, was reserved for publicistic material which was conducted in the nationalistic spirit. The *ha-Pardes* introduced Bialik, brought back Mendele to Hebrew literature, and added a number of literary creations of others; no small service, indeed.

Of longer duration and, due to that, of greater importance for the development of the literature of the period was the *Luaḥ Aḥiasaf*, started in 1893 and published regularly until 1905, and after a long interruption, a volume appeared in 1923 which was the last. It was of modest proportions—about four hundred pages to a volume in small format—but it retained some of the features of the larger annuals devoting a small portion to commercial matters and giving a necrology of the year as well as a chronicle of events in Jewish life. The greater part of its content was devoted to literature in all its phases, belles-lettres occupying the important place. During the twelve years of its

regular appearance, there contributed to it almost all the leading novelists, poets, and essayists of the day. Notable among the scholarly essayists were Simon Bernfeld and D. Neumark who wrote on historical and philosophical subjects. The humorist, Levinski, contributed an annual feuilleton under the name *Philosophy of the Luah* or *Astrology of the Year* wherein the events of the year were commented upon humorously. Valuable features of the *Luah* were an annual bibliography and a number of biographies of outstanding literati, either contemporaries or of the near-past.

The *Luah* was edited during its existence by the following writers: Moses Lilienblum, Reuben Brainin, Eliezer Kaplan, Joseph Klausner, and the last volume (1923) by J. Thon.

57. OTHER ANNUALS

At the turn of the century, Sokolow made another attempt at publishing an annual, this time limiting himself to smaller proportions, and he began to publish in 1900 the *Sefer ha-Shanah* (The Year Book) of which four volumes appeared. It retained in a limited form the feature of dispensing useful knowledge devoting a number of pages to commercial data, but the main interest was literary. Its program was intended to fulfill the following purposes: (a) to publish articles, essays, and stories which on account of their extent, could not be printed in dailies and weeklies; (b) to survey and discuss the events of the year; (c) to analyze more thoroughly and at length the problems of Jewish life. Of these three purposes only the first was realized in a comparatively satisfactory manner, the emphasis having been placed on the essays and articles. There were, on the whole, few stories published in the volumes of the *Sefer ha-Shanah* and also few poems and these by less famous poets. On the other hand, a number of historical and literary essays were published there, among them a long review by Atlas on Halevy's important historical work, *Dorot ha-Rishonim* (Sec. 101), biographies of writers, philanthropists, and outstanding Rabbis and popular essays on scientific subjects. Notable contributions to modern Jewish history and history of Hebrew periodical literature were the *Zikronot* (Reminiscences) of A. J. Papirno (Vol. III. Sec. 50) and A. S. Friedberg, respectively. The first afforded a glimpse into the lives and personalities of several writers of the Haskalah period who were connected with the Zhitomir Rabbinical Seminary, while the second characterized Zederbaum as a man and

editor. Papirno also wrote a review of Tschernichowski's first collection of poems and was the first to proclaim the genius of this young poet. With the exception of surveys of some of the Zionist Congresses, there were no surveys of the events of the year, and the publicistic part was filled by Sokolow himself.

Besides these, there appeared from time to time, literary miscellanies of greater or lesser value, which served as gathering places for a group of writers. Such were the miscellanies published by the *ha-Meliz*, *ha-Gat* (The Wine-Press), *ha-Goren* (The Bundle of Sheaves) and the *ha-Gan* (The Garden) in 1897, 1898 and 1899 respectively. They were edited by L. Rabinowitz and contained essays, stories, and poems.

Finally, there are to be noted two periodical publications of a distinct character devoted to special branches of literature, one an annual, the *ha-Goren*, and the other the *Reshumot* which appeared at irregular intervals of time.

The first, which appeared for ten years was edited by S. A. Horodexki (Sec. 106) and was devoted exclusively to studies in the fields of Jewish history, literature, religion, and ethics. Almost all the leading Jewish scholars of the day participated in it, including many from Western Europe who had hitherto written mostly in European languages. Among the frequent contributors were A. E. Harkavy, B. W. Bacher (Vol. III, Sec. 84), S. A. Poznanski (Vol. III, Sec. 88), M. Friedman, and many others. Many biographies of Rabbinic scholars of the ages were contributed by the editor himself.

The second was devoted to Jewish ethnography and folklore and was edited by A. Druyanow with the assistance of Bialik and Rabnizki. Preparations were made for its publication in 1914, but meanwhile the War broke out; the first volume was then brought out in 1918 at Odessa, and later, a number of volumes were published at Tel-Aviv.

It had several departments: (a) descriptions of forms of life of the Jewries of the world, especially the Oriental Jewries in their various phases, such as community organizations, ghettos, occupations, art, kinds of food, leaders and outstanding personalities, and many kindred matters; (b) religion and ceremonies as practiced in different Jewish centers; (c) language and literature embracing dialects, proverbs, folk literature, and similar studies; (d) art and poetry, such as folk songs, dramas, games, and descriptions of art objects used in the home and synagogue; (e) historical documents; and (f) miscellanies.

The volumes are veritable treasures of Jewish ethnography and folk-

lore in all the enumerated phases except in art. Among the noted contributors were A. Z. Idelson, the historian of Jewish music, S. A. Poznanski, S. Asaf, and many others.

The third volume of the *Reshumot* is devoted entirely to documents and stories of eye witnesses of the massacres in the Ukraine during the years 1918-1920. They form a blood-curdling chapter in the history of the martyrdom of Israel.

E. QUARTERLIES

58. THE HA-ESHKOL AND HA-TEKUFAT

There appeared, on the whole, two quarterlies of a general literary character during the period under discussion—there appeared a number of quarterly publications devoted to special subjects, especially to Rabbinics—one during the pre-War period, the *ha-Eshkol* (The Cluster), and the other in the post-War times, the *ha-Tekufat* (The Period).

The first was published in Cracow beginning in 1898 and was edited by J. S. Fuchs and A. Günzig. However, although it was called a quarterly it did not appear regularly but at indefinite times. It had no specific literary program, but laid emphasis on historical and literary studies though it gave ample space to belles-lettres, especially to poems. A number of writers and scholars contributed to it; even Tschernichowski published many poems in the volumes. Of the noted scholars, there participated Solomon Buber (Vol. III, Sec. 84), A. A. Epstein, H. Brodi, and others. As the *ha-Eshkol* was published in Galicia it served to a large extent as the organ of expression for Galician writers.

The *ha-Tekufat*, published from 1918 to 1929 with occasional interruptions, was the most important literary periodical besides the *ha-Shiloah*. It was published first in Warsaw under the editorship of D. Frishman, who was succeeded by F. Liachower, then in Berlin edited by S. Tschernichowski, B. Katz, and S. Rawidowicz. A few volumes appeared later after several years interruption in Tel-Aviv.

Its purpose was to help produce good and creative literature, especially in belles-lettres. It therefore gave much space to stories, novels, poems, and dramas. It did not neglect other phases of literature and had special departments for translations, essays, criticism, and one for the short essay (*Reshimot*). It was edited with good taste, and all that was published therein was of high literary quality. Its bulk enabled

writers to publish complete books in it in several installments, and a considerable part of the post-War Hebrew literature appeared in its pages. All the famous older writers and many of the younger contributed to it, and several of the latter gained their literary spurs in its pages. A number of the works which appeared in the volumes of the *ha-Tekufah* were already noted by us and some will be discussed in the proper places.

BOOK VII
YIDDISH LITERATURE AND JEWISH LITERATURE IN
EUROPEAN LANGUAGES
(1800-1935)

CHAPTER VI

RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF YIDDISH LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

59. *INTRODUCTORY*

The literature surveyed in this chapter was written in that vernacular spoken by a large number of Jews, which had hitherto been called Judaeo-German (Vol. II, Ch. XII), and now is designated as Yiddish. The change of name, however, is not a matter of accident or of whim, nor is its significance exhausted by the fact that it was generally used by writers from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It connotes several important facts bearing on the nature and character of the literature produced in that language during the last one hundred and thirty-five years.

It denotes, first, a change in the place of production of this literature. While up to the beginning of the last century almost all of the literature written in this vernacular was composed in the Germanic countries, the scene changed completely from that time on. With the advance of the last century this particular vernacular was abandoned by the Jews of Germany and was entirely appropriated by the Jewries of the Slavonic lands who called it Yiddish, an appellation which expresses a feeling for and a sense of ownership of that language. Henceforth, all literary works in Yiddish were written either by writers residing in Slavonic countries or by those who had emigrated from them and settled in other lands, as is the case of the Yiddish works produced in this country and in West-European lands.

Second, it denotes a change in the very character of the vernacular. As long as books were written by writers who lived in lands where German was spoken for readers who heard and employed that language in their daily transactions outside the ghetto walls, there was really no severance of the language spoken by the Jews from the parent language. The numerous Hebrew words as well as the antiquated forms and peculiar grammatical constructions employed by the

dwellers of the ghetto did not alter the fundamental character of the tongue. Hence the name Judæo-German was employed both by Jews and non-Jews, to designate the speech of the ghetto, and was a correct and proper appellation. The situation differed when the literature began to be produced by writers hailing from Eastern Europe. The Eastern-Europeans, who continued to use the vernacular they brought with them from Germany in the thirteenth century for over six hundred years, had introduced many changes in it. The number of Hebrew words incorporated in the daily speech was considerably increased, and similarly, Slavonic words and expressions replaced the German equivalents; what is more, grammatical forms were changed, verb forms altered, tenses omitted, and nouns modified. In short, the dialect spoken by the Jews of Eastern-Europe at the end of the eighteenth century resembled a plant transported from native to a foreign environment differing in the composition of soil, moisture, and climatic conditions. In the course of the centuries, it rooted itself in the alien soil and deviated more and more from its original form until it became a species in itself merely resembling the genus. Henceforth, it is called Yiddish, for not only did it undergo all the above-mentioned changes, but it also absorbed much of the spirit of the people who spoke it for generations.

Third, the name Yiddish literature denotes a change in its very character. Like the modern Hebrew, the Yiddish literature of the last one hundred and thirty-five years is primarily secular. The greater part of the Judæo-German literature of the earlier centuries was, as noted above (Vol. II, Sec. 165), of a religious nature, and only a small part, consisting of romances and novels translated from other languages, bore a secular impress. The situation is reversed in the modern period. There were few new religious books composed during this span of time. Whatever books of this character did circulate among the masses were older productions repeatedly reprinted. Even the most popular type of this literary species, the *Tehinot* (Prayers of Supplication) recited by the large majority of several generations of Jewish women were reprinted in stereotyped form and little innovation was introduced in them in spite of their individual character. Consequently, almost all works which were produced in Yiddish during modern times bear a secular character in a much larger degree than those written in Hebrew for there were still hundreds of Rabbinic books written in the latter language which deal with various phases of

the Jewish religion both in its legal and other aspects, while very few such books appeared in Yiddish save for the reprints of older books.

Secularism, however, is not the only point of resemblance between these two literatures of the modern period in Jewish history, the Hebrew and the Yiddish. In fact, there is a close parallelism between the two, and both reflect similar movements and tendencies during the entire length of the period. Yiddish like Hebrew had periods of enlightenment, of nationalism, and ultimately one of great productivity dominated by aspirations to become the national language of the Jews, or at least of a great majority of them. The reason for such parallelism is not far to seek. Both literatures originated in the same type of Jewish life, that of East-European Jewries. It is, therefore, small wonder that they both reflect the movements, currents, and conditions of that life.

While there was parallelism in the development of these two literatures during the modern period there was no real likeness of character, for the differences outweigh the resemblances. First of all, there is the difference in the position of the two languages in Jewish life during the ages. Hebrew was, for centuries, a literary language and not a spoken one; Yiddish, on the other hand, was a spoken but not a literary medium. Hebrew was the share of the intellectuals; Yiddish that of the great masses. Furthermore, Hebrew at the beginning of the modern period, possessed a great and rich literature, accumulated through the centuries, a depository of many works expressive of creative talent and genius. Yiddish, on the other hand, could not lay claim even to a single work of talent or of real originality. The result of these markedly different positions of the languages was that when the process of adjustment of Jewish life to a new environment began, it was signalled by a literary revival of Hebrew which, by its beauty of expression, wealth of literature, and dignity of position, was considered the proper means for the renaissance of the Jewish spirit and the modernization of Jewish life, while Yiddish was entirely neglected by the leaders of the Haskalah movement, who would not even consider it as a means of elevating the great masses, or as a medium of dissemination of knowledge among them. Moreover, the early leaders of the Haskalah movement who belonged to the Germanic Jewry looked down upon that vernacular and, as we know, considered it an obstacle both to the modernization and the emancipation of the Jews and therefore endeavored with marked success in

Western Europe to eradicate it entirely. The case was not much different even a generation later when the Haskalah was transferred to the East-European countries. The leading *Maskilim* influenced by their German predecessors shared the same attitude towards Yiddish in spite of the fact that the language was spoken by all the Jews of these countries including themselves. Some of the intellectually enlightened hoped to supplant Yiddish with the language of the land, while others were not as sanguine, but almost all of them despaired of turning the spoken vernacular into a literary language. Only a few of the writers of the Haskalah deigned to produce a work or two also in Yiddish which they together with the other intellectuals called the "servant" (*Shifḥah*) as compared to Hebrew, the "mistress" (*Gebirah*).

The consequences of such an attitude were changes in the courses of both languages and their literatures during the modern period. Hebrew tried to penetrate into wider circles of the people, and aided by the national idea and its concomitants, it ultimately became a spoken language, while Yiddish struggled in the reverse direction, and helped partly by the same idea and largely by other factors, ultimately became a literary language possessing a ramified literature of high quality.

The path of modern Yiddish literature in its process of development was much harder than that of the Hebrew, and every step in its course of struggle was beset with numerous obstacles so that progress was achieved only after painful effort. Hebrew, due to its history, position, and the number of its intellectual adherents, fared much better. The Haskalah period produced an extensive Hebrew literature while the corresponding period in Yiddish literature brought forth only a few works of value and a multitude of novels of low quality. In fact, Yiddish literary productivity in the proper sense of the word began only in the late sixties of the last century at the time when the Hebrew Haskalah literature had already begun to decline.

During the preceding six decades of the last century, as said, little of value was produced. The bulk of Yiddish literature at the time consisted of stories intended to amuse the readers with their grotesque content and plots. They were written, like the Judaeo-German romances and tales of the Mediaeval ages (Vol. II, Sec. 165), primarily for the women and the uneducated men. The attitude of the writers in Yiddish during the larger part of the nineteenth century towards the language and its literature was little different from that of the leaders of the enlightenment. The language was considered the

medium of expression of the uneducated stratum of Jewish society and consequently it was felt that its literature had to adapt itself to the tastes and capabilities of the masses. Some writers, however, considered it their duty to introduce the Haskalah ideals and tendencies in that literature too and therefore wrote stories or dramas wherein the contemporary Jewish life was portrayed, its defects accentuated, and the glories of enlightenment eulogized. But most of the works were not published during the lifetime of the authors.

It was in the sixties of the last century when the Jews in Russia began to breathe more freely on account of the liberal policy of Alexander the Second, when hope for Jewish emancipation rose in the heart of the enlightened that the idea dawned upon some of the leaders of the Haskalah to prepare not only the upper stratum of the people but also the large masses for the new era. It was then that Zederbaum began to publish the *Kol Mebaser*, the first Yiddish weekly in Odessa, and it was then that Shalom Jacob Abramowitz who had hitherto labored indefatigably for the spread of knowledge among his brethren by means of Hebrew came to the conclusion that his labors could not bear the desired fruit as long as the majority of the people did not understand the language in which he wrote. Thus, weighed down by the question which he asked himself: "For whom and of what avail is my labor?" he turned to Yiddish and published his first work in it in 1864. This work was followed by many others and Abramowitz was metamorphosed into Mendelev Moker Seforim. The example of Abramowitz was imitated by several other *Maskilim*, such as I. J. Linezki and others, and soon the neglected Yiddish suddenly became a subject of interest to many writers.

The attitude towards the language, however, was little changed. It was still considered the language of the uneducated, a jargon in which one must write of necessity, and the sudden literary productivity in that tongue was regarded as only a means for the improvement of the spiritual and moral state of the masses. The works of Mendelev and his followers aimed, therefore, only to portray the life of the ghetto in such a way as to arouse the desire for change.

But here the unexpected happened. Abramowitz or Mendelev surpassed himself; his artistic skill and his literary ability overbalanced the practical purpose he had in mind, and his works, though permeated with the tendency of enlightenment, became literary masterpieces, and thus Yiddish gained a full victory in its struggle to become a literary

language. The works of Mendele and his associates gave an impetus to further development of Yiddish literature and soon other Hebrew writers turned to Yiddish and began to produce their works in it. An important factor in the development of literary productivity was the national idea. In order to spread the ideals of the national renaissance among larger Jewish circles, writers began to use the vernacular as a means of propaganda and allowed themselves to forsake for a while the mistress, Hebrew, and temporarily court the servant, Yiddish. Ere long, however, the means became an end. The more writers produced their works in Yiddish, the more important and dignified it became in their eyes, and when I. L. Perez and Shalom Rabinowitz, later known as Shalom Aleikem, made their appearance in Yiddish, it gained another victory. It thus came about that in the late eighties when Shalom Aleikem began to publish the first Yiddish literary annual, *Die Yiddishe Folksbibliothek*, it marked a step forward in the history of that literature. Hitherto all productions had been more or less individual effort, sporadic attempts on the part of writers to produce a work or two. But the annual served as a gathering place for the scattered forces and an incentive for further productivity. Besides, it widened the literary horizon, for hitherto most of the productions had been works of fiction while the fields of publicistic articles, essays, and criticism had hardly been touched upon for lack of an organ. The *Kol Mebaser* of Zederbaum in the sixties devoted its pages exclusively to stories, and even *Der Yiddicher Folksblatt* published by him in the early eighties, still considered fiction the main staple of the readers. The annual, however, gave expression also to other phases of literature. Soon other annuals and miscellanies began to appear, and thus the horizon widened and the literature progressed both in quantity and quality.

Still, even in the nineties, when literary activity in Yiddish had increased and interest in it had intensified, it did not occur to its champions to place its literature on an equal footing with Hebrew. As late as 1891, I. L. Perez, one of the builders of that literature, wrote in his introduction to the annual, *Die Yiddishe Bibliothek*, of which he was the editor, that he does not expect Yiddish to take the place either of Hebrew or of the language of the land. He expresses his view as follows: Yiddish cannot become the leading language in Jewish life. That place belongs to Hebrew. Nor can it become the language of the teacher; that must be the tongue of the land. Its role is merely that of

the nurse who teaches the child to speak. When the child grows up he may discard the nurse but as long as he is in need of it, respect is due to it.* In other words, Yiddish has no future, but as long as a large number of Jews speak it, it is the duty of the writers to employ it as a literary medium in order to benefit the masses. This is the old Haskalah ideal that literature is to be used as a mode of education. In fact, Perez designates his entire program by one word, education. There is, however, a distinction between him and his enlightened predecessors. To them education meant merely correction of the defects in Jewish life, while to him the concept is more embracing, including the cultivation of the sense of beauty, art, and literature, or in other words, the development of the man in the Jew and the introduction of European values within the ghetto. Perez thus applied the best ideals of the later Haskalah to the development of the literature of the masses, but did not in those days dream of making a cult of this vernacular and claiming for it not only equality with Hebrew but precedence over it. Had things continued in this manner, the development of Yiddish literature would have undoubtedly gone on at a much slower pace than it subsequently did, but no rift in the Jewish outlook would have been created, and more intellectual unity would have prevailed in Israel. History, however, willed otherwise.

Towards the end of the last century, a new factor entered into Jewish life which promoted the development of Yiddish literature. This was the socialist idea championed by a group of Jewish intellectuals who in 1897 formed the party henceforth known as the *Bund* (The League). The leaders of the organization were, as pointed out above (Sec. 2), at first permeated with a spirit of assimilation and cosmopolitanism, but practical necessity, since their field of activity lay among the proletariat who spoke only Yiddish and lived a Jewish life, forced them to modify their views. The language of the masses became, therefore, the most important means of propaganda which included also educational activity along social economic lines. Literary activity in Yiddish thus received both a new impetus and a new coloring. The emphasis was laid not on the fact that it is spoken by the people at large but that it is primarily the language of the proletariat, the speech of the masses, while Hebrew is the tongue of the upper classes. A new literature of enlightenment began to develop under the spur of socialism which contained an anti-traditional and anti-Zionist note, and thus consciously

* Yiddishe Bibliothek, Vol. I, p. I.

or unconsciously a kind of rivalry was initiated between Hebrew and Yiddish.

As the *Bund* was forced more and more by the rise of the national idea among the European socialists to adopt a national policy, the question of a national language arose, and demands were made that Yiddish be declared the national language. The idea which would have been considered preposterous a decade earlier, even by the leading Yiddish writers, such as Perez, Shalom Aleikem, not to say Mendelevich, now, in the early years of the present century, found not only an echo in the hearts of many but even ardent and belligerent champions.

The ground for the acceptance of such an idea was prepared by several factors. First there was the fact that there had arisen out of the socialist and the intellectually assimilated ranks a group of young radical writers who became, either because of a lack of Jewish education and knowledge, or for other reasons, rabid anti-traditionalists. They saw in Hebrew a force of reaction, especially since its literature was permeated with the Zionist spirit, and consequently they clamored that Yiddish be proclaimed *the* language in Jewish life and thus secularize and metamorphize it completely. Second, there was the dream of national rights fluttering before many of the radical leaders. The idea, which first originated among the Austrian socialists who hoped to reconstruct that monarchy as a federation of autonomous nations, soon found followers among the Jewish socialists who hoped for a similar fate in Russia when the revolution would come. Even the *Bund* reluctantly accepted a plank in its program to champion Jewish autonomy when the happy day would arrive. Other radical leaders, especially the followers of H. Zhitlowski, were more ardent in the advocacy of this view. This autonomy, as stated, implied the possession of a national language, and this, argued the protagonists of the idea, could be no other than Yiddish. They were thus vociferous in their demands for the hegemony of the erstwhile despised vernacular in Jewish life. The third factor was the rise of Yiddish literature in the new Jewish center, the United States. This literature, for reasons which will be discussed elsewhere, was dominated in those days by an extremely secular, radical, and anti-traditional spirit, and its comparatively great influence on the large Jewish masses gave support to the idea of raising Yiddish to the first place in Jewish life.

As a result of all these strivings, a conference of Yiddish writers and leaders of popular organizations was called in 1908 at Czernowitz in

Bukowina, for the purpose of clarifying the status of Yiddish in Jewish life. Views differed. Many Yiddish writers, L. Perez among them, were reluctant to yield to the demand of the extreme Yiddishists, but they were overruled. The result was the birth of Yiddishism, a new spiritual and intellectual current in Jewry.

The philosophy of its followers is not of a uniform type, nor are all the followers united on a definite point, but the underlying principles are more or less general. These assert directly or indirectly that Yiddish is the national language of the Jews, at least in those lands of the Diaspora where it is spoken. Further, that the cultivation of its literature is the surest means of preserving the integrity of the Jews in the Diaspora, and that a Jewish culture, primarily secular, is to be developed by means of that literature to take the place of the old religious Hebraic culture. The last assertion is more implied than openly asserted.

The vicissitudes in Jewish life during the War and after the War in East-European countries favored the realization of this view to a certain extent in such countries as Poland and Lithuania. For a time, as is well known, the dream of national rights seemed to have been at least partly on the verge of realization. The Yiddishists seized the opportunity and for a number of years entrenched themselves in the above-mentioned countries, founded a school system, cultural institutions, and developed an extensive literature. The dream of national autonomy had faded more than a decade ago, but the movement went on and it even gathered strength, until the outbreak of the present War, for it was paralleled by a similar movement in certain circles in this country.

We will not speculate as to the future of the movement nor probe the justification of its principles. We will reserve that for the end of the survey. Suffice it to say for the present that this movement, which at times assumes the aspect of a cult, helped to increase Yiddish literature quantitatively and ramify and elevate it qualitatively, so that at this time, it forms a worthy contribution to world literature, as well as an important expression of the Jewish genius.

60. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

From the brief delineation given above of the general lines along which Yiddish literature developed during the modern period, some of its leading characteristics can be inferred. The fundamental trait which

colors all its phases of expression is that it is primarily a folk literature, that is, that it ministers mainly to the needs of the masses who crave emotional satisfaction more than intellectual development. As we have seen in our survey of the earlier Yiddish or the Judaco-German literature (Vol. II. Ch. XI), it arose in response to the needs of the women and uneducated men for instruction in religious matters and for entertainment in time of leisure, both of which functions it fulfilled adequately. Both of these functions continued to be operative, even during the modern period, and conditioned the development of Yiddish literary productivity during the larger part of this span of time, except that the instruction aimed at was not of a religious but of a secular and didactic nature. Almost to the end of the last century, the bulk of Yiddish literature consisted of romances, tales, and stories, in short, of fiction which aimed to entertain the readers either by amusing them or giving free play to their imagination. The other part consisted primarily of tales or stories with a didactic purpose, aiming to improve the manners and the life of both the individual and the group, or of popular works imparting bits of information on various subjects, such as general history or phases of general knowledge.

As a result, fiction forms the *forté* and the most original element of Yiddish literature, for when times changed in the eighties of the nineteenth century and writers of talent appeared on its horizon their genius found expression in this particular branch of spiritual activity. Not so poetry, for while the poetic productions of the Yiddish bards are also stamped with the folk spirit, only very few of the singers rise to great heights, and even these are weighed down by the narrowness of the world and the life in the midst of which they lived and sang.

On comparing the two aspects of belles-lettres, namely fiction and poetry in Hebrew and Yiddish with each other, we find that their qualitative excellencies are dissimilar. Hebrew, on the whole, excels in poetry, while Yiddish prevails in fiction. The reason for this difference is not far to seek. The subjects of the Hebrew novels and stories of recent times are individuals, representative of the Jewish youth of later days, and these, torn from their moorings and moving in a shattered world, could by the very conditions of their psychology and environment not form the proper material for portrayal. On the other hand, the masses or the group which form, on the whole, the subjects of the better part of Yiddish fiction constitute a more suitable element for stories or novels. In the life of these, the original traits of the Jewish

character in its manifold are well-preserved and are more amenable to treatment by a skilful and talented observer.

The case is different with poetry. This literary species draws its sustenance, not from the surface of the life of a people but from its very depths, and its roots penetrate into the recesses of the national soul. In it all the aspirations, ideals, traditions, hopes, achievements, failures and experiences of a nation through the ages find expression. And when these elements are lacking, the wings of the poet are clipped. It is for this reason that Yiddish poetry remained in the folk stage, and did not reach the level of national poetry, for due to the fact that the language is spoken and understood only by a part of world Jewry, and drew its inspiration only from the life of the Diaspora, and to a great extent from the material phase of that life, it did not reflect the Jewish soul in its entirety, but merely certain aspects of it. At times, this poetry stirs and touches the chords of the human heart, but it does not express either Jewish woes or hopes in their full depth and significance. The very language is unsuited for that. The emotions of the Jews were expressed for millennia in Hebrew, and they thus became adapted to a definite linguistic mould. These feelings cannot be transferred into another body without loss of spirit or essence. Therefrom arises the generally circumscribed character of Yiddish poetry. That exceptions abound, is evident.

The one-sided reflection of Jewish life and the paucity of expression of Jewish thought are other characteristics of this literature. Fiction may be a good mirror for reflecting the daily life and emotions of a people, but emotions and daily needs do not form the entire life of a people. Reflection, discussion of problems, and their solution also form aspects of the life of a nation. In such expressions, Yiddish literature is woefully deficient.

Throughout the entire nineteenth century, Yiddish possessed only occasional annuals or miscellanies, but had no regular periodicals. There was consequently no possibility of developing a publicistic literature which would deal with the problems of life. When such periodicals did make their appearance in the first decade of the present century, many were dominated by the spirit of radicalism which saw in Jewish life only one problem, the material one, or the class struggle. For a time, it is true, there was developed an extensive publicistic literature, and quite a ramified one, which embraced not only discussions of problems, but also instruction, especially in the field of the social

sciences. But this extensive literature was, as noted, permeated by a party spirit and concentrated mainly on educating the masses in the economic theory of the socialist stamp. There was little originality displayed in this type of literary activity, for most of the articles and essays and even the books were translations of such works in other languages. Criticism fared better, for with the development of interest in Yiddish and with the rise of its literary standard, there arose a number of critics who developed that branch of literary activity; but even in this field, the partisan spirit predominated.

Even the periodicals of a non-partisan nature, such as the dailies which were published for the Jewish middle class and which had a leaning toward the nationalistic idea, devoted their publicistic articles to the problems of the moment rather than to the perennial Jewish problems which require deep study and much discussion.

As a result, the Yiddish publicistic articles do not reflect the inner phase of the Jewish world of ideas in its struggle for adjustment and the soul of the nation in its various metamorphoses and changes in modern times as the Hebrew publicistic and essayistic literature does, nor do they reveal to us the great drama of Jewish striving for national rehabilitation.

Equally meager is the development of Jewish learning and Jewish thought in this literature. During the two decades since the War, in which Yiddishism became a cult, strenuous efforts were and are being made to develop a particular Yiddish culture and quite an extensive literature was produced embracing many branches and including numerous historical studies. But in all these efforts, sincere as they are, and correct and painstaking as the studies seem to be, there is a lack of inspired originality; on the whole, they are circumscribed and limited. The spirit of tradition and the completeness of the soul and experience of the race are absent. The history studied is limited primarily to the last few centuries of the life of the East-European Jewries; the literature investigated is mainly the early stages of Yiddish or Judaeo-German; and speculation is limited either to translation or to excerpts from works of general philosophies or to popularization of the views of Hassidism. The great highways of Jewish learning and knowledge, the routes of the Bible, the Talmud, the Agada, Jewish religious thought, trodden by hundreds of scholars and thinkers through the ages, are little travelled by the builders of this culture.

All that has been said does not mean to minimize the fact that

many important contributions have been made by Yiddish scholars in the field they have chosen. It is merely intended to determine more definitely the role this literature played and is playing in Jewish life and thought. Yiddish literature still remains a folk-literature struggling valiantly for expression, but forced by the conditions of its birth and the tendencies and factors of its development to remain within certain limits beyond which it cannot possibly pass. It is with its excellences and shortcomings that the following survey intends to deal.

61. *EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE*

Of the two motives noted above, which prompted writers to turn to Yiddish as a medium of expression, namely to instruct and enlighten the masses and to satisfy their need for entertainment in time of leisure, the first was, for a time, the more prevalent one. In fact, it was due to the desire on the part of some of the leading Hebrew writers of the Haskalah to devote a part of their literary activity to the elevation of the spiritual state of the less intellectual class of Jews, that the foundation of this literature was laid.

The first of such writers was Menahem Mendel Leffin or Lewin (1749-1846),* a Galician *Maskil* who, on the advice of Mendelssohn, devoted his literary activity to the popularization of knowledge among his brethren. After translating a number of works which deal with the elements of several sciences, popular medicine, and ethics into Hebrew, he turned his attention to the masses and undertook a new Yiddish translation of the ethical and poetical books of the Hagiographa. He felt that the older Judaeo-German translations of the Bible were antiquated and were not understood by the readers in East-European countries who spoke a Yiddish which already differed greatly from the one employed by the earlier translators. His aim was therefore to render the books of the Bible he thought especially excellent, on account of their poetic quality and moral teaching, into the vernacular spoken by the Jews of Poland at the time. His translation of the Book of Proverbs appeared in 1817. Its appearance, however, aroused opposition in the ranks of the enlightened who saw in this attempt treason to the ideals of the Haskalah which strove to break down the barriers between the Jews and the nations in whose midst they lived by promoting the language of the land—in this case the German—to a dominant position in Jewish life. One of them, Tobias Feder, wrote a pamphlet

* For his life see Vol. III, Sec. 22.

in which he bitterly attacked both Leffin and his translation. This attack deterred Leffin from publishing his other translations of the books of the Hagiographa. As a result, the translation of Kohelet was published only in 1873, while the renderings of the Psalms and Job remained in manuscript.

Still, even this abortive attempt was of great value for the development of Yiddish literature, for it helped to mould the language and prepare it as a medium of literary expression. Leffin was a man of taste and possessed a linguistic sense which penetrated into the spirit of the folk-speech; he, therefore, succeeded in creating new words and expressions which enlarged its diction and enabled writers to give utterance to thoughts and nuances of feeling hitherto unknown in the language.

Whether it was the attempt of Leffin which acted as a stimulus for others or whether it was a simultaneous desire on the part of some other Haskalah writers to bring enlightenment to those who could not read Hebrew cannot be definitely decided. The fact, however, remains that during the twenties of the last century a number of literati became interested in Yiddish and made it a medium of their literary expression. In the same year, 1817, Heikel Hurwitz (ca. 1750-1822), hailing from Uman, a city in the province of Kiew, Russia, published a three volume work, bearing the Hebrew title, *Zofnat Pa'anah* (Discovery of Hidden Things), which was a translation of a German book dealing with the story of the discovery of America. Hurwitz lacked Leffin's mastery of language and his style is replete with Germanisms, yet the work had great value at the time, for it was the first secular book published in Yiddish. Its content, which gave information and kindled the imagination, appealed greatly to the masses. As a result, it was very popular in its day and was read by large numbers, both men and women. Even the scholarly men to whom the Talmud was the acme of all knowledge fell under its spell and frequently fingered its pages. A. B. Gottlober, who later became a distinguished Hebrew writer and poet (Vol. III, Sec. 40), tells us in his reminiscences that he was so charmed by the book in his youth that he read it several times, once even when he had already tasted the fruit of the enlightenment, and always derived great pleasure from it.* Such enthusiasm aroused by a single work proves to us the great desire for knowledge and information which resided in the hearts of the ghetto dwellers, though at

* *Zikronot*, in *Yiddishe Folksbibliothek*, Vol. I, pp. 255-6, Kiew, 1888.

times, not all were conscious of it. Another translation of the same book by M. A. Günzburg (Vol. III, Sec. 35) appeared in 1824.

However, in spite of the popularity of the work, Hurwitz and Günzburg found few imitators; only one more attempt was made in that direction. In 1829 Mordecai Suchastower from Brody, Galicia, who later emigrated to Russia and became an instructor in the Zhitomir Rabbinical Seminary, rendered into Yiddish a collection of fables from the Russian by the famous fabulist, Krilow, which he called *Woilen Ezah Geber* (The Right Counsellor). It was never published in his lifetime and only excerpts of it were made public in 1885 by Gottlober in the *Yiddishe Folksblatt*. Instead, the development of that literature proceeded along the lines of didacticism, which more and more assumed the form of instructive fiction. The aim of these writers who belonged to the class of enlightened was to point out to the masses the grave defects of their life, both of the individual and of the community. They dwelt primarily on the narrowness of Jewish education, the baselessness of Jewish occupations, the mismanagement of the Jewish communities by self-appointed leaders, and above all, the excessive fanaticism of Hassidism and the bigotry of its *Zaddikim*. They preached cultivation of secular studies, purified religious beliefs, dignity of manual labor and all other virtues which tended to elevate and improve Jewish life, in fact, the very same ideals propagated by most of them in Hebrew. But in view of the fact that the readers of the works were not interested in discussions of a publicistic nature, they clothed their ideas in the garb of fiction, which ultimately proved to be a more powerful weapon in the struggle against ignorance and fanaticism since such works also entertained the readers. This garb was of varying textures. With some writers, it was only a matter of form, a thin covering; the content was publicistic and only the form of a belletristic nature. With others, both the content and form bore that character, while the instructive element was expressed only in the general tendency of the plot. In view of the fact that in addition to instruction there was also the desire to entertain the readers and to satisfy their emotional needs, there is no wonder that some other writers reduced didacticism to a minimum and devoted themselves entirely to fiction. All these factors brought about the development of an extensive productivity, primarily belletristic, which with a few exceptions can be called the Yiddish Haskalah literature.

The first of such didactic writers was the famous Hebrew writer

and champion of Haskalah, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (Vol. III, Sec. 34). Though he, like all the other enlightened of his time, never planned to perpetuate Yiddish as the language of the people or to raise it to the dignity of a literary tongue, yet he found it necessary to write several booklets in that vernacular. In the very same year in which he wrote his famous work *Teudah be-Yisrael*, 1828, he also composed a small work in Yiddish entitled *Die Hefker Welt* (The World of Anarchy). He gave it a belletristic form for it is a triologue between a stranger, a Lithuanian Jew visiting a Volhynian town, and the two leading Jews of that town. The local Jews, after the ordinary greetings and hand-shaking, begin to complain of the evils of communal management and the tyranny of the self-appointed leaders who rob the poor by levying heavy taxes. The stranger innocently wonders at such disorder and inquires whether the Rabbis do not protest against the injustice. He is then given a more detailed description of Jewish life in Volhynia where the scholars are subjected to the powers of the *Zaddikim* who foster ignorance and often help the mighty in their rule over the poor. The stranger is astonished at such unheard-of deeds, and his astonishment arouses the local men to loquaciousness. He is told more details of the oppression of the poor, especially the fact that their children are turned over to military service in place of the sons of the rich. This is followed by a portrayal of the low spiritual and economic state of the people, many of whom are misled by Haskalah, and idle away their time telling stories of the wonders of the saints and in visits to the courts of the *Zaddikim* and neglect their families. Other evils, such as love of display at weddings and similar affairs, and insecurity of Jewish occupations, come in for their share of criticism. The book concludes with a short speech by the stranger in praise of agriculture.

Die Hefker Welt was circulated in manuscript for a long time and only published sixty years after it was written, in the year 1888 in the first volume of *Die Yiddische Volksbibliothek*. Still later it was republished in book form and a second part was added. In fact, that which is called a second part of the *Hefker Welt* is really a separate work, and is, in reality, a Yiddish recast of Levinsohn's Hebrew satire, *Emek Refaim* (The Valley of the Dead) published in 1832. It is primarily an anti-Haskalah polemic written in a semi-belletristic form, resembling similar satires on the same subject by Joseph Perl and Isaac Erter (Vol. III, Sec. 31). Its content is a description given by one who had fallen into a coma and was revived, of what he saw and heard

in the other world during his brief sojourn there. Among other things he recalls the confession of a Ḥassidic *Zaddik* of his deeds in the lower world. With considerable detail and much exaggeration, Levinsohn describes the hypocrisy, the greed and ignorance of these saints who mislead the people and exploit them for their own purposes. It is one of the most powerful diatribes written against Ḥassidism by the writers of the enlightenment period. It is, of course, superfluous to emphasize that the literary value of both parts of the *Hefker Welt* is not very high, though the second part contains in places a wholesome humor. Yet they possess a certain historical importance by virtue of the fact that they were the first original works written in Yiddish.

62. ISRAEL AXENFELD, SOLOMON ETTINGER, AND ISAAC MEIR DICK

Levinsohn's Yiddish work was only dressed in belletristic garb, while its content was primarily publicistic. But there were in that generation other writers who, endowed with a talent for belles-lettres, carried on the struggle for enlightenment among the masses by means more subtle and more pliable for the popularization of the ideals of the Haskalah, namely by means of novels, dramas, and poems. One of the most prolific of these writers was Israel Axenfeld (1787-1866).

Axenfeld was born in the city of Nemirov in the province of Podolia and was raised in a Ḥassidic environment, and in his early youth was a follower of Naḥman Bratzlaver (Vol. III, Sec. 8). In accordance with the custom of the time he married young, but after a few years of unhappily married life he divorced his wife. He then turned to commerce and during the Napoleonic wars in Russia he acted as the commissary agent of one of the Russian armies. This occupation, which necessitated journeys to various parts of the Russian empire as well as to Galicia and Germany, brought him in contact with a number of enlightened Jews and he soon joined their ranks. It seems that during the years 1820-1821 Axenfeld lived in Brody, Galicia, where he became acquainted with the leading *Maskilim* of that center of enlightenment. In 1824 he moved to Odessa where he resided the greater part of his life practicing law and also acting as notary. Only two years before his death in 1864, he settled in Paris in order to spend his last years with his sons who resided in the French capital.

In Odessa Axenfeld began his literary career in Yiddish, and being a very prolific writer, he composed, during the thirty years of his produc-

tivity, numerous novels, dramas, and dramatic sketches. In a letter to the well-known Hebrew writer, A. B. Gottlober, written in 1862 wherein Axenfeld entreats the former to endeavor to find a publisher for his writings, he gives a list of twenty-six works which he had composed up to that year. Many of them are novels of great length and consist of four, six and even of twelve parts. The list, though, is not complete, for several works were omitted. Most of these works, however, were not published during the author's lifetime; like Levinsohn's *Hefker Welt*, they all circulated in manuscript in many Jewish circles. Axenfeld made strenuous endeavors to have his novels and dramas appear in print, but to no avail. Only in 1861 when he had reached the seventy-fifth year of his life were two of his smaller works published—the drama, *Der Erster Yiddisher Rekrut* (The First Jewish Recruit) and the novel, *Das Sterentichel* (The Kerchief). Four more dramas appeared posthumously, *Man und Weib*, *Shwester und Bruder*, *Die Genarte Welt* (The Deceived World) and *Kabzan Oisher Shpiel* (The Poor and Rich Game), the first in 1867, and the latter two in 1870. Of the other works we possess only the titles.

The literary quality of all these long drawn-out works, dramas, and sketches is not very high. Axenfeld was neither a master of technique, nor did he possess deep insight into the human soul, and as a result, the stories and dramas are very primitive. Even the very titles are inelegant. Yet they are not without merit, for they do reflect Jewish life in the ghetto in that age to a large degree, and they are distinguished by a note of realism. Grotesque as some of the plots appear, they are not products of the imagination, but, as the author states frequently, are based on actual episodes in Jewish life. The realism is enhanced by the copious description Axenfeld gives of his heroes and characters. Their physiognomy, dress, occupation and mode of life are portrayed in detail, in fact excessive detail; nor is the environment omitted; it too is delineated with accuracy and exactness though not always artistically.

The themes and motives of the works are those of the usual enlightenment literature, namely the struggle with fanaticism, especially with extreme Hassidism, attacks against unscrupulous *Zaddikim*, criticism of the leaders of the communities who oppressed the poor, on the one hand, and praise of secular knowledge, acquisition of European culture, and advocacy of just treatment of the masses on the part of communal leaders, on the other hand. Like in all literature with a

tendency, the description of the heroes and characters in Axenfeld's works corresponds with his ideals and aspirations. The fanatics are as a rule depicted in dark colors, while the enlightened are represented as idealists and noble-hearted. They are, of course, victorious in their struggles with their opponents. Yet he was not entirely blind to the faults of the enlightened. In one of his dramas, *The First Jewish Recruit*, in which the tragedy resulting from the decree of Nicholas I to draft young Jewish men for long military service is portrayed, the secularly educated Aaron Kluger, who helps the communal leaders to throw the burden of that service on the poor, comes in for much reproach.

A large part of our author's works consists, as we have said, of dramas. We must not, however, suppose that they were intended for the stage; he could hardly dream of that in those days. He distinctly says in his prefaces that they were meant for reading by groups or circles. He used this form merely for the purpose of being more emphatic and effective, for as we have seen, dialogue was considered the best form in those days. His style is still crude and represents the Yiddish spoken in the provinces of southern Russia, especially in Podolia. It contains many expressions peculiar to those places and even the particular pronunciation prevalent in the provinces is retained in the orthography. Despite these shortcomings, the works of Axenfeld represent a step forward in the development of Yiddish literature in the last century.

The second important Yiddish writer of the period was Solomon Ettinger (1800-1855). He was born in Warsaw but due to the fact that his father died while he was yet a child, he was raised and educated in the town of Lentchne where his grandfather Mendel Ettinger was the Rabbi of the community. He received the usual Jewish education of the day, but in addition he also acquired some secular knowledge consisting mainly of an acquaintance with the German language. He married young and for a time went to live in Zamosc with his father-in-law. Soon, however, the question of an occupation presented itself to young Ettinger, and he went to Odessa in search of one. There, a rich merchant, Jacob Nathanson, proposed to him that he accompany his son to Lemberg, Galicia, and study pharmacy together with him at the University. He accepted the proposal but on arriving at Lemberg he at first hesitated to matriculate at the university as that would have required a change from the Hassidic garb into modern dress. How-

ever, after some persuasion by an enlightened friend, Samuel Landau, he entered the university but instead of pharmacy he studied medicine. In Lemberg, he became acquainted with Mendel Leffin's Yiddish works and this most likely served as an incentive for the literary activity in that language which he began in his student days.

After his graduation, he returned to Zamosc and engaged in the practice of medicine continuing at the same time his literary work. For a time he was forced to give up his profession due to the new law enacted by the Russian government forbidding graduates from foreign universities to practice. During that time, he established an agricultural colony near Zamosc and most likely occupied himself with agriculture. In the late forties he went to Charkow, was examined by the medical faculty of the university, and after receiving his diploma returned to Zamosc where he continued his practice until his death.

Ettinger exerted great influence in the enlightened Jewish circles of Zamosc and other Polish cities, and his works were widely circulated in manuscript. He was also on friendly terms with all the leading *Maskilim* of the day, Isaac Baer Levinsohn, A. B. Gottlober, Hayyim Zelig Slonimski, and many others. He carried on a correspondence with these writers and scholars, and they expressed appreciation of his literary work. Yet in spite of all this, Ettinger, like Axenfeld and Levinsohn, did not live to see his works published during his lifetime. Only twenty years after his death in 1875 was his drama, *Serkele*, published anonymously, and only in a much later second edition was the name of the author given. A second work of his, *Mesholim und Lidelach* (Fables and Poems) was published by his son in 1889.

Ettinger was far less prolific than Axenfeld, for it is not known whether he wrote other works besides the two mentioned, but he excelled the former in technique, literary talent, aesthetic sense and polished style. Like all the enlightened of his time, he idealized knowledge and culture, but the didactic element is not in great evidence in his writings, though it is not entirely absent, nor is the striving to improve the spiritual and cultural state of his brethren the primary motive in his literary activity. He composed his dramas, fables and poems merely out of a desire for artistic and literary expression.

The plot of the drama, *Serkele*, is not the typical product of Haskalah literature which usually involved a struggle between the fanatics and liberals, but one the like of which was prevalent in the general literature of the period, the struggle between the villain and the hero

or heroine. The villain in this case is Serkele, ignorant and coarse but a woman of strong character who becomes rich by means of fraud. Her brother, a rich merchant, goes on a journey to a distant land, and she, believing him dead, forges a will in which he bequeathes to her all his property and wealth and places his only daughter in her custody. She acts the tyrannical rich lady, mistreats her niece, while she spends much wealth on her own daughter. The suffering niece is, of course, nobler, more educated, and more beautiful than the daughter, all of which angers Serkele. She even attempts to accuse her niece and her lover, a medical student, of theft. All her plans, however, are frustrated; her brother returns from his journey, the fraud is discovered and the good triumph. The characters are well drawn, the plot is intriguing, and the construction of the acts and scenes skillful. Ettinger is especially successful in drawing the characters of the common people, such as the servants, the match-maker (*shadchan*), grain broker, and others. There is much humor, both in the actions and the speech of the characters, which adds to the literary value of the drama. Skill is also displayed by Ettinger in his fables. The themes are mostly borrowed from the works of German and French fabulists, but he succeeded in dressing them in real Jewish garb and drawing morals suited to the conditions of his time. He also wrote a large number of original fables. In them, the didactic tendency is quite in evidence, and many of them aim to correct the deficiencies of the Jewish ghetto life in the manner of the *Haskalah*. His fables and short poems are distinguished by grace, flowing style, and lightness of rhyme and are frequently tinged with pungent humor. Thus far they have not been very much surpassed.

Different from both Axenfeld and Ettinger was Isaac Meir Dick (1814-1893), the third belletristic writer of those times. He was even more prolific than Axenfeld, but did not, like him, write complicated novels, nor was he dramatic and artistic like Ettinger. He devoted himself to writing short stories which were adapted to the taste of the great masses of the age. Dick was born, reared, and lived all his life in Wilna, the great *Haskalah* center of Lithuania. He was a member of the circle of *Maskilim* of that city, mastered the Hebrew language, and even wrote several small works in that tongue and was conversant with German and French. He was engaged for a time as teacher, but later the writing of Yiddish stories became his profession. Like many of his colleagues, he did not possess much love for the language of the masses,

but partly because he recognized the necessity of educating the people in the language they spoke and understood best, and partly, as said, from more practical motives, he began to write his short stories. The famous printing-house of Romm engaged him to write a story each week for which they paid him the magnificent sum of six roubles for sixteen pages. He kept his agreement for a number of years and accordingly the number of stories reaches into the hundreds. It is placed by some as four hundred. Dick drew upon other literatures, folk tales, Agadic books and collections of legends for subjects of his stories, and many of them really possess the character of tales and continue the literary tradition of the late Middle Ages (Vol. II, Sec. 165). A large number, however, are original in content and possess a realistic ring. The characters are drawn from life but are somewhat exaggerated. Dick possessed a wholesome, though not always a dignified, sense of humor, and this together with his realistic characterization of his heroes made his stories very popular. It is interesting that he continues the Mediaeval tradition in another regard, that both in his prefaces and in the stories proper he always turns to the woman reader (*Leserin*) and never mentions the men. He expected, of course, to have the Jewish housewives of the middle class as his patrons, and on the whole, adapted himself to their taste. The didactic element, though it was not his principal motive for writing, is in great evidence. A large number of stories conclude with the advice of the author to draw a moral from the events told, and at times, the moral instruction is pointed out at the beginning. Knowing the character of the readers, he leaves nothing to the imagination but discusses the derived teaching in detail. The evils criticized by him are the usual ones discussed by the writers of the Haskalah, such as those resulting from one-sided education, or from forced marriages.

The great fault of Dick is his style. Like many of the enlightened, he was an admirer of German, and he, therefore, endeavored to introduce many Germanized words without any attention to grammar. The result was a queer Yiddish.

For almost two decades, Dick was extremely popular and his stories were found to be in every Jewish home. Hardly a housewife missed buying a story every Friday together with the other purchases for the Sabbath and he was also read by men of all classes. But suddenly his popularity began to wane, and he was soon forgotten by the readers. The reason for such change in the attitude towards this author, as

given by one critic, was his difficult and conglomerate style. It is, however, more likely that the cause was the new class of readers which made its appearance in the ghetto and the new type of Yiddish novels which began to be published in the sixties and seventies of the last century.

63. *THE POPULAR NOVELISTS*

The change in the life of the Jews of Russia which became perceptible in the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century and which found its strongest expression in the development of the Hebrew Haskalah literature (Vol. III, Ch. V) also gave an impetus to an extensive literary productivity in Yiddish. The desire for widening the horizon of life beyond the narrow confines of the ghetto was not limited to the more intellectual classes but penetrated also to the masses. There arose a young generation who engaged in the more humble occupations, such as apprentices in the various trades, clerks, servants, and they too needed some secular literature to while away their leisure time, and knowing no other language but Yiddish, they demanded in that language the type of fiction which kindles the phantasy, enriches the imagination, and carries the reader into a world full of romance, intrigue, and surprises—in short, books to relieve them from the burden of drab existence. Dick's stories could not satisfy the new class of readers any more; both their brevity and their content militated against them.

The demand created a supply. Soon there arose men, who with little belletristic talent but with much energy, undertook to supply these hungry readers with lengthy novels with intricate plots, full of intrigue and strange episodes. The master of this type of fiction was Naḥum Meir Shaikewich (1849-1906), better known by his pseudonym, Shomer. He wrote over a hundred of such novels, and while many of them are in reality recasts in a distorted form of novels in other languages, still a large number are his own productions. Their literary and artistic value is almost nil, for there is no development in the progress of the plot nor sequence of action, nor any psychological insight into the souls of the characters. Yet they have a certain art, peculiar in its kind, the art of throwing a large number of apparently unconnected episodes together and uniting them by a thread spun out of the author's imagination. The unity is often loose and the episodes grotesque, but these things did not worry the author. His main pur-

pose was to intrigue and hold the interest of the reader, and in this he succeeded. He knew their tastes and desires. He knew that they longed for love, for emotional outbursts, for a glimpse of a world different from the miserable one in which they lived, and he gratified their desires. Love is the chief staple of his novels, and most of his characters are deeply emotional. They are rhetorical, and sigh and shed tears when the course of love is obstructed. There are always obstacles, for the characters, as a rule, are divided into two classes, good lovers and villains, who do their utmost to embitter the lives of the gentle and good, but all in vain, for love triumphs at the end. In reality, there is one plot in all the numerous novels of this fertile writer which is merely changed in form by a different arrangement of the parts and by a change of the setting. The characters are drawn from all classes of society, but with a preponderance of representatives from the nobility. Counts and Countesses are favorite characters in Shomer's novels.

Shomer soon found numerous imitators, and these exceeded their master in the wildness of their flights of imagination, and in their breaking of all rules of good taste. Shomer was still of the enlightened—he also wrote several stories in Hebrew—and he endeavored to inject some moral tone in his novels, but his followers knew no bounds in their romantic vagaries and their works frequently border on the grotesque.

Still, the popular novels of the better type, at least had a social value if not a literary one, for they introduced some variation in the otherwise monotonous life of thousands of men and women of the Jewish masses. They aroused their phantasy, infused in their hearts a desire and longing for a life tinged with beauty and enlivened by emotion, and thus lent color to their drab existence.

Indirectly, the popular novel helped in the development of its very opposite, which served as its antidote, the realistic novel and story which began to appear in the late sixties and gradually began to exert influence on a section of the Yiddish-reading public. The popular fiction taught people to read and once they had cultivated that habit, the more intelligent among them sensed the grotesqueness of these stories, their lack of artistic skill, the nauseating sweetness of their content and were thus prepared to digest the more wholesome literary food which was being prepared at the time by a group of earnest and serious-minded writers.

64. *THE HASKALAH LITERATURE*

The reaction against the spread of tasteless, popular novels came, as stated above, through a group of writers who aimed at not only amusing the readers but at instructing them and pointing out the deficiencies and dark spots of ghetto life with a view to its improvement. They did not succeed in checking the popularity of the long drawn-out novels with the romantic plots, but they did succeed in creating a better type of belletristic literature. They offered the reader realistic novels and stories, depicting their own environment in all its somber colorings; the latter saw a reflection of themselves, and as a result began to strive for change in their lives.

The first and foremost of this group was Shalom Jacob Abramowitz or as he is primarily known by his pseudonym, Mendele Moker Se-forim. His great contribution to both the Hebrew and the Yiddish literature was described by us above, and there is no need to repeat it. We only wish to add that, in Mendele, the artist far surpassed the propagandist of enlightenment, and his works, while permeated with a definite purpose, do not belong to merely the period in which they were written but to the best Yiddish literature of all times.

The others fall far behind Mendele, yet even their works had merit and still possess historical value. A distinguished writer of this group was Isaac Joel Linezki (b. 1839). Like many other writers of the time, Linezki was raised in a Hassidic environment, ultimately became enlightened and as a result left his native town, Vinnitza, Podolia, for larger Jewish centers in search of learning. For a time, he attended the Rabbinical Seminary at Zhitomir, where he made the acquaintance of Zweifel, Slonimski, and other leading *Maskilim*. He later settled in Odessa, and for many years devoted himself to Yiddish literature. He wrote satirical poems and a number of novels, but his chief literary contribution is *Der Poilisher Yungel* (The Polish Youth). It was his first literary work and as it proved later, the best. Published first as a serial in Zederbaum's Yiddish weekly, *Kol Mebaser*, in 1868, it later, due to its popularity, saw several editions as a separate work. The story is written in the form of an autobiography of a Polish young man who tells of the vicissitudes of his life from his birth to the age of thirty. It is divided into two parts, the first devoted to the life of the narrator up to the age of thirteen, when in accordance with the custom of the time, he was married. In it, the Hassidic life and environment

of a small Jewish community is depicted in all its details. The exaggerated piety, the fanaticism, the prevailing superstitions, the social customs, the manner of educating the children, life in school, occupations and leading personages in town are all described fully with the special intention of projecting the backwardness of that life. In the second part, the "court" of the Ḥassidic *Zaddik*, where the narrator served as a leading clerk (*Shamas*) is described in all its intrigues and machinations both on the part of the Rabbi himself and of his assistants to uphold the prestige of *Zaddikism*. The description places the leader and his followers in a strongly unfavorable light, laying grave accusations at the door of the Rabbi, his family, and his right hand man, the *Gabbai*. There is undoubtedly gross exaggeration in the stories, but much truth in the general description of the environment. The narrative is vivid and at times tinged with humor, but it is also replete with coarse expressions and generally lacks refinement and literary elegance. The work resembles the satire of Joseph Perl, *Megale Temirin*, (Vol. III, Sec. 30) to a large degree, but is not as polished and as artistically constructed as the latter. It was, as stated, very popular in its time on account of its grim realism and biting satire, and still possesses some value as a typical picture of Ḥassidic life of two generations ago in its less attractive phases.

Another realistic writer was A. M. Shazkes (1825-1899) who is otherwise known as the author of the *ha-Mafteah* (The Key), a collection of rationalistic comments upon, and explanations of, a large number of Agadic passages. His chief Yiddish work is *Der Yudisher Ereb Pesach* (The Jewish pre-Passover Days) wherein he presents in a series of sketches and portraits the turmoil and chaos created in the Jewish homes in Lithuanian towns by the preparations for the Passover. The various episodes, the baking of *Mazẓot*, the housecleaning, the communal meetings, the distribution of *Maót Hitim* (special charity for Passover), are all artistically and humorously depicted. There is also much publicistic matter in the book, for the author discusses the origin of numerous customs and argues against the rigorousness of Passover laws, but on the whole it makes delightful reading. It is still worthwhile perusing as a faithful portrait of a life gone-by.

This group of writers, irrespective of the merit of their individual works, collectively mark an important stage of progress in the history of Yiddish literature, for once the path of realism was pointed out and ordinary Jewish life became a subject for description and portrayal,

real masters made their appearance. Within a short time there arose a new generation of writers, men of talent and artistic skill, trained in the literary schools of Europe, and in addition endowed with a penetrating eye and feeling heart. These looked deep into the Jewish life of the time, saw it in all its phases and presented it in their novels and stories in its various colors with art, skill, and sympathy, thus creating a new epoch in Yiddish literature.

65. *THE NEW EPOCH.* ISAAC LEIB PEREZ

The new spirit which began to dominate Jewish life in Russia in the late seventies of the last century which expressed itself first in a general centripetal tendency, namely in a greater interest, on the part of the intellectuals and writers, in the cultural and spiritual values of their people, and later, after the fatal years of 1882, in the national movement, also exerted an influence on the rise and development of Yiddish literature.

True, the national ideal in its essential aspect, as a striving to rehabilitate the Jewish people in its own land, found its principal expression in the Hebrew literature of the period and its echo in the Yiddish was but faint. The other aspects, though, the desire to strengthen the Jewish spirit, to create cultural values, to make the masses conscious of their heritage, and to elevate their spiritual status, were strongly manifested in Yiddish literary productions. No longer was the striving to spread secular knowledge among the masses and to point out to them the grave faults in their life, or the desire to amuse the reader a motive in literary productivity—though these were not entirely absent. Instead, it was motivated to a large extent by an urge to create new literary values which would enrich the national culture and by their intrinsic worth and aesthetic beauty raise the spiritual level of the readers. These writers did not look upon Yiddish as a means to enlighten the masses, nor did they consider the writing in that tongue a matter of grave necessity. They rather accepted that language as an important and national expression of Jewish life and strove to raise it to the status of a high literary medium.

This tendency made its first appearance in 1888, a year which marks a turning point in the history of Yiddish literature. In that year, Shalom Rabinowitz, known primarily by his pseudonym, Shalom Aleikem, published the annual, *Die Yiddishe Folksbibliothek*. It was permeated by the new spirit and new attitude towards Yiddish

literature and brought to the front a new group of writers, among them not only Shalom Aleikem, but also one who was destined to play an exceptional role in the development of that literature, Isaac Leib Perez.

Isaac Leib Perez (1851-1915) was born in the city of Zamosc, Poland, and was raised in a Hassidic environment. Due to the fact that this important Jewish community was one of the early centers of Haskalah in Poland, Perez aligned himself with the movement while still a student at the local *Yeshibah*, and became conversant with the German, Polish, and Russian languages. He then planned to leave his native town and enter one of the Rabbinical seminaries at Wilna or Zhitomir. His plans, however, were frustrated by his parents who married him off to the daughter of Gabriel Judah Lichtenfeld, a resident of Zamosc. This marriage, however, only favored his pursuit of the Haskalah, for Lichtenfeld was himself a *Maskil* who devoted himself mainly to the study of mathematics and also published a number of poems in the Hebrew periodicals of the day. He undoubtedly encouraged his young son-in-law in the cultivation of his literary talents. Perez made his debut in the year 1875 with a few poems of anti-Hassidic content in Smolenskin's *ha-Shahar*. He continued to write poems in this periodical and in 1877 he and his father-in-law published a collection of lyric and narrative poems. Soon afterwards, there came a lull in his literary activity. He was much disturbed by an unhappy family life and for a time sojourned in Warsaw. On his return to Zamosc, he divorced his wife, remarried, and for a few years engaged in business, but soon turned to the study of law and became a local attorney. During the years of his practice of law, Perez wrote and published little. Influenced by the democratic tendencies in the liberal Russian literature of the time, he turned his attention to Yiddish, the folk language, and wrote a considerable number of poems in that tongue, but these were mainly circulated in manuscript or were transmitted orally. With the appearance of Sokolow's *ha-Asif* (Sec. 54), Perez returned to Hebrew literature and published in these volumes as well as in the *Kenesset Yisrael* (Sec. 55) of Rabinowitz a number of poems and short stories in which the influence of the national ideal is evident. About the same time, he made his debut in Yiddish in Shalom Aleikem's annual, *Die Yiddishe Folksbibliothek*, with a long narrative poem, *Monish*. From that time on he published a great number of miscellanies, poems, and stories in that language. The

enthusiasm with which his writings were greeted by the intellectuals and by the better class of Yiddish readers encouraged him in his work and led him to devote himself more and more to literary activity in Yiddish. In 1891 he himself edited an annual entitled *Yiddishe Bibliothek*, which appeared, with interruptions, in several volumes. Meanwhile Perez had settled in Warsaw and became an official of the Jewish community which was in the hands of the assimilationists, by whom he was somewhat influenced. On the other hand, the awakening of class consciousness among the masses of Jewish workingmen and the spread of socialistic ideas among them which, as noted above (Sec. 2), turned the development of Yiddish literature in a certain direction, exerted still greater influence upon Perez, and stamped his writings in Yiddish with the spirit of that movement. He even became active in Jewish socialistic circles, and as a result was imprisoned for a number of months during the year 1899. These various influences kept him aloof from the national movement which dominated Hebrew literature in the nineties of the last century. Yet Perez did not forsake Hebrew literature entirely, and for a decade and a half we find him frequently participating in almost all periodicals and miscellanies of the period, even publishing a collection of poems in Hebrew entitled *ha-Ugob* (The Harp), and also a collection of stories and feuilletons. He translated many of his Yiddish stories into Hebrew, and in 1901 the publishing company, *Tushiah*, issued four volumes of his short stories in Hebrew including those originally written by him in that language as well as those translated from the Yiddish both by himself and others.

The five years from 1900 to 1905 were years of fertile literary activity for Perez in both languages. His works during that time are distinguished by a lack of any special tendency and are animated by a spirit of artistic creativeness.

With the year 1905 there again came a change in Perez's attitude towards Jewish life and letters. Due to the rise of both the revolutionary spirit in Russia, on the one hand, and the national tendency among the Jewish workers, on the other hand, (Sec. 2), a movement to proclaim Yiddish the national language of the masses arose. Perez, because of the important place he occupied in that literature and because of his popularity, was reluctantly drawn in to head this new tendency. Thenceforth, during the last decade of his life, though he still loved Hebrew and occasionally wrote in that language, he

was the recognized leader of the Yiddishist movement, and in most of his writings there is evident a desire, though not fully expressed, to make Yiddish dominant in Jewish life. We must thus consider Perez, primarily a Yiddish writer whose works enriched that literature and placed it on a high level.

From the short survey of the life and activities of Perez, it becomes evident that to give a characterization of his literary contribution and determine its nature is extremely difficult. We deal here with a writer whose many-sided literary talent expressed itself to great advantage in all types of literature. He wrote poems, short stories, dramas, allegories, satiric sketches, and humorous feuilletons. There is one form, though, which he did not use, and that was the novel. This was due to his dynamic and manifold personality. The novel, which requires concentration of mind and a certain repose of the soul, was beyond the powers of this able writer. His eye saw too many things at the same time and his heart responded to too many emotions simultaneously. In this he differs greatly from Mendele. The latter drew his portraits of Jewish life on a large canvas, and his picture is consequently a group picture in which description plays the most important part. The individual and his inner tragedies, his struggles of the soul, and his reactions in trying moments, is hardly depicted by Mendele. It is different with Perez; his canvas is limited for he seldom deals with the group. His *métier* is the life of the individual and of that, only certain episodes and moments. But in that limited field he is master par excellence. His colors are few but he employs them with such artistry that they reveal the very depth of the soul of his characters and the chosen episodes are so characteristic that they tell the story of a life time. The difference between these two artists of Jewish life is like the difference between the two methods of imparting knowledge, the deductive and the inductive method. Mendele followed the first. He drew the common and general characteristics of the life of the group from which we get a glimpse of the particular, of the individual. Perez, on the other hand, is inductive. He causes numerous characters to pass before us with their peculiar traits in trying moments of their lives. But in that variety there is also unity, the common human and Jewish substratum; and ultimately we form a notion of Jewish life in general which is probably less embrative and more circumscribed than the one presented by Mendele, but deeper and more penetrating.

As varied as the literary forms which Perez employed, are his motives and moods. He is simultaneously realistic and romantic, didactic and amusing, biting satirical and deeply pathetic, clear and outspoken, and mystical and symbolic. All these characteristics and opposites emanate from his manifold personality. He was a typical *Maskil* who rebelled against the shackles of the past, who strove to break the chains of tradition and the ancient outlived customs, and at the same time he was one of the few writers who sincerely valued the spirit of real religiosity and who pictured so beautifully the exalted moments of religious life. He was the true democrat, lover of the masses and champion of the poor, yet he was dominated by the spirit of the aristocracy of the intellect. He was sceptical of the practicality of the Zionist ideal, and yet he believed that it is possible to create a complete Jewish culture in the lands of the Diaspora which will preserve Jewish nationality and supply content to Jewish life, and furthermore that Yiddish should be the language of that culture. In fact, there was hardly a party in Jewry during that period which could claim Perez as its real follower. He was considered by the Jewish socialists and is still considered the prophet of their ideals, the exponent of their views, and yet he dreaded the day of the rule of the proletariat. In one semi-belletristic essay written in 1906, in the year of the first Russian Revolution, when the *Bund* (Jewish Socialist Party) was dominant among the Jewish masses and the ascendancy of the proletariat seemed imminent, he says, "I am with you in your struggles. My eye rests lovingly on your flaming flag; my ear does not tire listening to your mighty song—and yet I fear you. I fear the subjected when they rise to power for they then become oppressors; I fear your talk that humanity must march like an army, for after all humanity is no army. I fear lest you lower the cedars to the level of the grass and protect only the gray uniformly-clipped herd. There will be no empty stomach but souls will starve, and the eagle, the rising human spirit will stand with broken wings and feed at the crib along with the ox and the cow—I hope for your victory but fear and dread it."¹

The Yiddishists who declare Yiddish the national language of the Jews look upon Perez as an apostle of their ideal, and yet he openly declared at the famous Czernowitz Conference in 1908 that to him Hebrew is the national language and Yiddish only a folk tongue.²

¹ In *Mein Winkkele*, Vol. XIII of Collected Works, 1920 ed. pp. 7-10.

² *Erste Yiddische Sprach Konferenz*, p. 108, Wilna, 1913.

Even later, when he was forced by the pressure of his colleagues to modify his views, he still asserted that Hebrew is the head of the Jewish people and that without a head one cannot live.³ Yet he ridiculed the idea of a Hebrew revival and the attempt to turn the language once more into a spoken tongue seemed to him sacrilegious. The language of the Torah and the prophets, says he, cannot and must not become the language of the street.⁴ But how then should its influence on our life which he himself acknowledged to be so essential be exerted? To this he gave no answer.

He was dissatisfied with Zionism both because of its impracticality and because of its narrow view of the Jewish destiny. He did not want the Jews to be merely a people, living on a small strip of land. Nay, it must be a *Messiah* people, striving and even suffering for the liberation of the world, the freeing of humanity. This is the mission of the eternal people. It must, however, not be carried out, as the humanists before him preached, by assimilation and by divesting themselves of Judaism, but on the contrary, by fostering nationalism and by creating Jewish values. How such a dream could be carried out, and how such miracles could be accomplished, the dreamer, the seer, never explained.

Such was Perez with all his contradictions, and all these qualities are reflected in his numerous stories. He is constantly changing, continually dynamic. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish periods in his literary productivity for the transition is more a matter of mood. Not only are there changes of view in stories written within a short time of each other, but even the same story may contain several elements.

However, beneath this variety of qualities, tendencies, and inclinations there is a certain unity, for there are certain fundamental traits which largely characterize all his works. These are the Maskilic or the intellectual-ethical, the emotional-artistic, and the romantic-realistic. As can be seen, even each of these traits is really composed of two apparently opposite strains, yet with Perez the components are combined with such harmony that they really form one trend. I said the Maskilic, for Perez not only began as a *Maskil* but remained one all his life. He always retained the best traditions and ideals of the enlightenment movement, which did not emphasize merely the acquisition of

³ Ibid., p. 287.

⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

knowledge, but also its application to life. The Haskalah glorified knowledge not for its own sake, only for the good it could bring to human life; thence stemmed its devotion to the ideals of humanism and its belief in the continual progress of the human spirit. All writers possess ideals, while there are few to whom the expression of these ideals and their various nuances is as integral an element of their creation as it was to Perez. However, it was not mere ideals that he valued, but their application and their ability to elevate and improve human life, and therefore his intellectualism is, as a rule, combined with an ethical element, though not always in the same proportion. At times the mere joy of thinking is stressed, and at other times, good and noble deeds.

Perez possessed vast sympathy for the unfortunate and the down-trodden; still it is not mere feeling and sympathy for the Jewish masses which he expresses in his stories, for he is also in search of the artistic, the beautiful. There is beauty even in misery provided you can discover it beneath the mass of ugliness and chaos. This beauty is, of course, not of the plastic, nor the external, variety, but the inner beauty, that of the character and the soul. Consequently, Perez became the master artist of the Jewish soul, who reveals it to us not only in its suffering but in its flight and rise toward the beautiful.

Perez always strove towards the higher regions of life. Striving and continual progress were fundamental characteristics of his personality; hence the romantic strain in his creations, the search for the unknown, the love of the imaginary and of the vision which fashions a more beautiful universe than the real and prosaic world. Yet he was endowed with a strong sense of realism, and his sketches, on the whole, contain realistic delineations of portions of life, and while, from time to time, he breaks the bounds of reality and escapes into the realm of visions, he never loses the realistic touch entirely.

These traits and qualities are manifested in all his stories, sketches, dramas, and even in his poems but not always in equal proportion. At times one element is stressed and at times another. It is these changes and various combinations which supply variety and manifoldness to Perez's works.

Perez began his literary activity, in the manner of the day, with an attack against religious fanaticism of the ghetto as expressed by Hassidism and he carried on this struggle against the out-lived forms in life, whether of a religious, or political, or social nature, in many of

his stories. He later learned to differentiate between the essence of religion and tradition and their form. The first he glorified, while he attacked the second more subtly but nonetheless vigorously. He mastered the art of satire and employed it artistically for he veiled it in the cloak of legend, folk story, or tale, but the more veiled, the more penetrating and biting it is. In the brief tale, *Der Golem*, which apparently relates an innocent legend about the famous homonculus created by Rabbi Löw of Prague, he injects a bitter satire on what he considers petrified Judaism. He concludes: "The *Golem* is still here; he is not forgotten, but the *Shem*—the Ineffable Name of God—by means of which the *Golem* was animated, is irreparably lost. The clay body of the *Golem* lies, and the cobwebs over it grow thicker and thicker, but no one is allowed to disturb it, for both the *Golem* and the cobwebs are sacred." How deep and penetrating is the satire in these lines against all views and ideals which are the result of mere habit and usage. All forms of hypocrisy are masterfully satirized in the tale, *Die Frume Katz* (The Pious Cat). The pious cat pities the frivolous canary which spends its days in singing and dancing without worrying about the hereafter (Olam ha-Ba), and concluding that the longer the bird will live the more sinful will it become, kills the canary as a sacred duty. But the act is discovered for the cat leaves feathers and spots of blood and it is punished. The next time, the cat swallows the bird, feathers and all, and again is punished. It finally concludes that it is not the blood nor the feathers, but the act of killing itself which is abominable, and it resolves to turn the sinful canary from the path of error by kindness, by embracing it and preaching to it. "But," ends the tale, "since a canary cannot live in air exhaled by cats, it died of suffocation."

The mechanical adherence to the forms of religion and to empty social customs while neglecting the spirit animating them is portrayed in all its hollowness in the tale, *Der Brilliant* (The Diamond). A villager found a diamond. Fearing to keep it unguarded, he hid it in the ground and placed a stone upon it to mark the spot, hoping that a time would come when greed and jealousy among men would cease so that he might take it out. His wife, noticing a new stone in the garden, wanted to remove it, but was restrained by her husband who persuaded her that the stone would bring them luck, whereupon she placed another stone beside the first for greater luck. The children imitated her and also placed stones. And in the course of generations

the placing of stones became a hallowed custom and the pile grew in height and width. The villager, on his death bed, told his son about the diamond and he in turn told his son, so that one in each generation knew the secret, but the custodians of the secret, moved by fear or other reasons, never revealed it. Besides, no one would believe them for the placing of stones had become a sacred act.

As time went on, the stones covered the garden and the fields and no ground was left for tilling the soil. The young revolted and wanted to remove the stones, but the old protested and defended the sacred custom with all their might. "Thus," concludes Perez, "the diamond is altogether forgotten but the war over the stones still goes on between the old and the young."

A penetrating criticism of the differences which separate men and nations and which often cause much bloodshed and hatred despite the fact that all these divisions and variety of conceptions are mere fiction and illusion is beautifully expressed by him in the allegorical story, *Die Fier-Farbige Lamtern* (The Four-Colored Lantern). In this story the animal world is drawn upon by the author. Four little puppies forsaken by their mother, which rushed to join the pack in a hunt, opened their eyes for the first time and saw the light of a candle placed in a four-colored lantern. Each one looking from a different angle saw a different colored light. "Light is yellow," shouted one; "light is blue," answered the other; "nay, it is red, ye blind ones," protested the third; "ye are liars," barked the fourth, "light is green." The controversy grew heated, and soon nails and teeth came into play and blood flowed, all in the name of truth and for the sake of truth. When the mother returned, she found one of her children on the threshold wounded and bleeding. "What has happened," asked she, "and where are your brothers?" "I have none," barked the puppy. "They are liars, perjurers, blasphemers of light." The moral is that truth is one, but men in their blindness and weakness see it in many ways and each is ready to kill his brother for the sake of "his" truth. The fundamental idea underlying the story is found in a different connotation in Baḥya's *Duties of the Heart*.⁵ Whether Perez borrowed it from there is unknown, but the very elaboration, the exquisiteness of the tale in which the moral is framed, both delight the reader and make him think.

Thus, in numerous stories and legends, Perez satirizes phases and

⁵ *Duties of the Heart*, Book II, Ch. I.

episodes of life, Jewish and general, such as religious petrification, social hypocrisy, oppression of the poor, false pride; and in all of these both elements, the intellectual and the ethical, are inseparably merged. The satire, however, does not depend entirely on the idea, but to a great extent also on the form, for Perez is master of both form and style. The style is endowed with a beauty of its own, and the typically Jewish expressions saturated with irony are bristling and pungent. The forms are of great variety; Perez not only humanizes the animal world, but even personifies the inanimate. In his *Mist Halomos* (Dreams in the Dump), torn shoes, broken heels, and worn soles are used by our writer as a vehicle of criticism of differences in the ghetto arising from false pride and imaginary class division. In his stories Perez almost realized the famous verse of Shakespeare, "Books in brooks, and sermons in stones." He went one step lower and made even the swamp yield him a satirical sermon. Thus he writes in his tale, *In dem Gemesachts* (The Swamp). The dwellers of the swamp, the worms, cherished a tradition which was handed down by the wise that the swamp with its stagnant water is the *Yam ha-Gadol*, i.e. the large sea. In this swamp they lived, well satisfied with themselves, for whoever lives in the sea is by nature a fish and they would call each other slippery eel, or mighty pickerel. On tombstones, the inscriptions carried the titles, crocodile, leviathan. The name, perch, was considered an insult by the worms for which they did not forgive even on the Day of Atonement. The tale is a satire on some phases of life in the ghetto, but for that matter also on Main Street in all small towns.

And just as his satire is biting and his critical eye penetrates beneath the surface of life and uncovers its incongruities and contradictions and brings a smile to our lips, so is his sympathy for the poor and down-trodden warm and genuine, and his portraits of human suffering and misery bring a tear to our eye. Perez, like many other Yiddish and Hebrew novelists and short story writers, drew upon the poverty of the ghetto dwellers as a theme for stories, but unlike the others, he does not delineate the life of the poor in dark colors alone. With a remarkable artistic gift he selects a few characteristics which represent both the tragedy of that life and its finer side, and even its inner beauty. The poverty of the Jewish town which is described so extensively and minutely by numerous writers, loses its ugly features in his tales, for the gloomy air of misery and need is brightened by rays

of light emanating from the souls of the characters described. A typical story of this kind is the one called *In Keler* (In the Cellar) in which the artist draws a picture of Jewish poverty, dark indeed, but still tinged here and there with brighter hues. The dark cellar serves as a common home for numerous families and individuals. Too poor to rent an apartment or a room, these people rent bed space in the cellar and each family appropriates a corner of its own. Perez, in general, is sparing in description of things or environment. He is interested primarily in persons; accordingly, in a few masterful strokes he depicts the guests of this unique "hotel"; Freude, the peddler in the market-place, Yonah the water-carrier and his wife, Beril the porter, and others like them, all sleeping after a hard day of hunting for *Parnasah* and dreaming of the hazards of life, while misery, suffering, and sickness stalk in the shadows. But in the midst of it all there is a flickering light in a corner separated from the rest by four canvas walls. In that little space there dwells happiness. A newly-married woman is awaiting the arrival of her young husband from the synagogue. He enters on tip-toe and a charming scene is enacted as the two plan together their future life on an income of eighty-eight roubles for six months. The calculation ends by demonstrations of love which imbue both with a sense of security. There is an idyllic beauty in that scene, which even the squalid cellar, the surrounding filth, and the loud snoring of the sleepers—the human derelicts—cannot mar.

In the *Meshulah* (The Messenger), we have Shemayah, the eighty year old messenger who is on his way to deliver a packet of money in a neighboring town. A blizzard breaks out and the octogenerian battles his way through sleet and snow to fulfill his trust. In his mind there unrolls before him the whole tragedy of his life, his long service in the Russian army, the days of poverty which followed him the rest of his life, the slow starvation of his wife Sprinze, and the departure of his children from home. But Shemayah does not protest nor despair. Through all these sad reminiscences there runs one comforting thought that in spite of all he is still able to work, and what is more, he is trusted with money and important letters. This sense of duty does not forsake him even in the last moments, when sitting on a heap of snow he is slowly freezing to death. His last thought is, "Praise be to God, they trust me with money." In this pathetic story Perez displays both psychological insight into the soul of the humble

man and deep sympathy for him who demands so little from life and is denied even that. There is very little action but the whole is a monologue given by the author on behalf of his characters. Beneath the pathos, though, there is a subtle irony at a state of society which warps the natural desires of men and reduces them to a minimum.

This subtle but bitter irony expressing a strong protest against the devastating effects of poverty upon the human soul, is strikingly revealed to us in the story, *Bontzye Schweig*. Bontzye is the typical dumb sufferer who bears all injuries, insults, and injustices in grave silence, without a murmur. In his characteristic manner, Perez portrays in a few strokes the deep tragedy of Bontzye, a tragedy of thousands like him. "When he was alive, the mud in the street preserved no impression of his feet; after his death the wind overturned the board on his grave. The grave-digger's wife found it a long way off from the spot and boiled a potful of potatoes over it. Three days after that, the grave-digger had forgotten where he had laid him. Thus Bontzye's life and death made no more impression in this world than a grain of sand carried away by the wind. In heaven, though, the case was different. There the arrival of Bontzye made a great stir. Troops of angels preceded him and sang songs of welcome. And when he was brought before the heavenly court and saw all the splendor of the courtroom, Bontzye, the stupefied sufferer, did not believe that it was he who stood there and thought that an error had been committed and that the reception, the songs, and the riches of the room were meant for some one else. But when the defending angel began to recite the tale of his woes during life he concluded that it must be he who is the center of attention. The prosecutor had little to say for nothing could be found against Bontzye and he said, 'Gentlemen, he was silent, I will be silent too.' The presiding judge then turned to Bontzye and said, 'The heavenly court will not pass judgment on you nor will it apportion you a reward. Take what you will. Everything is yours.' And of all the riches and treasures offered him, Bontzye asked, to the great confusion of the court, for a hot roll with fresh butter for breakfast every morning." This was the *summum bonum*, the height of delight for Bontzye who during a lifetime hungered and only occasionally munched a dry crust of bread. Perez does not write tirades against social injustice and against the scourge of poverty, but the answer of Bontzye speaks volumes.

In such manner and in numerous other ways does this artist of

Jewish poverty picture the life of the poor masses in all its ways. At times, as in the *Weber Liebe* (The Love of the Weaver), the suffering of the whole class of workers is pictured in its spiritual as well as in its material aspect. The love of the young weaver who corresponds with his future brother-in-law, a shoemaker, is frustrated by poverty, and his fiancée is forced to marry some one else. In another story we are moved to the depth of our souls by the exclamation of a poor Jewish mother, who after deciding to relieve herself from suffering by suicide, is prevented from carrying out her purpose by the cry of her infant. And while she nurses him, she gives vent to all her pain and anguish in a single statement, "Oh, God, I am not allowed even to die." (Der Kaas von a Yidene). In still another tale *Der Neier Nigun* (A New Tune), the author injects into his portrayal of poverty the note of religiosity. At the close of the Day of Atonement, a poor widower, leading by the hand his young son, goes home with the rest of the congregation. But there is no supper at home awaiting them. In vain does the child plead for a piece of bread. The father, in order to assuage the pangs of hunger, reminds the child that last year when the mother was alive they sang a new tune. The child is silent but when the father begins to sing, the child accompanies him amidst tears. We have a glimpse into a life in which the soul is nourished at the expense of the body.

The last story forms a kind of transition for our writer, wherein he passes from the portrayal of the gloomy realities of the ghetto life to the presentation of its ideal aspect, that of the Jewish soul, in other words, to the Hassaidic stories. Perez is distinguished not only as the artist of Jewish poverty but also as the poet of Hassidism. He was one of the first Jewish writers, who, unlike the enlightened who considered Hassidism a reactionary movement, saw in it an attempt to free the Jewish soul from the bonds of stereotyped religion, an endeavor to endow it with a sense of joy in life, deep religiosity and a strain of mystic communion with God. He, therefore turned to the Hassidic world, to its lore and legends, for inspiration, and drew from its spiritual treasures themes and motives for his stories and sketches. But, as in his other stories, it is not the external side of Hassidism which attracted him, but its soul, its essence, its innermost striving to commune with God, and its constant attempt to rise to greater spiritual heights. It is these qualities which enthused him and which he so masterfully portrayed. The symbol of the inner harmony

of the soul is the song and its melody, which were so intensely cultivated by the Ḥassidim. Hence the melody (Nigun) plays an important part and is a frequent motive in his stories.

In the *Mishnat Ḥassidim* (The Teaching of Ḥassidim), one of his earlier Ḥassidic stories or rather monologues, there is an attempt to present the value of the melody as a means for elevating the soul. A Ḥassid tells us of the greatness of the *Zaddik* of Nemirov. He repeats some of his teachings. The *Zaddik* used to say, "The world as a whole is one divine melody. All creatures are singers; each letter of the Torah is a tune, and each soul is an accord. Few people, though, understand this grand melody; only the *Zaddik*, who is the conductor, understands it, and hence he is always joyous." Then follow the tales of the wedding of the *Zaddik's* daughter and of the dance and song of the *Zaddik* at that wedding. That song, says the narrator, silenced the orchestra; it stopped all movement and penetrated into the souls of all present except one, and that one was the groom, the great Talmudic scholar. But even he did not escape the influence of the song. When he, the *Hatan*, delivered the Halakic discourse, he was unconsciously influenced by the spirituality of the melody and spoke with an enthusiasm that enchanted all. Once more the world stood still and listened attentively to the Torah of the groom who made the same motions with his hands which the *Zaddik* had made with his feet while dancing and singing. All were swayed except the *Zaddik* himself. This silent antagonism between the *Zaddik* and his son-in-law, the scholar, represents the antagonism in Jewry between the intellectualism of the *Mitnagdim*, and the emotional spiritualism of the Ḥassidim.

This antagonism which is only a secondary motive here forms the main motive in another story, *Zwischen Zwei Berg* (Between Two Mountains). The two characters are the Rabbi of Brisk, a giant of Talmudic learning, and the *Zaddik* of Biale who in his youth was the disciple of the former. The young disciple left his master at whose fountain of knowledge he drank deeply and whose great intellect he admired, for he found the light in his teacher's house, though brilliant and shimmering, cold and without warmth. He longed for companionship, for comradeship with all Jews, but the intellectual height of the Rabbi of Brisk isolated him from the masses and he left. He became the *Zaddik* of Biale, the guide of the masses, the source of inspiration and religiosity of the ignorant and the uneducated. He

taught them to trust and believe, to pray and sing, and to rise in song to God. At some later time, on the day of *Simḥat Torah*, the two, the Rabbi and the disciple met. "Why, Noah, did you leave me?" asked the Rabbi. "Because," answered Noah, "your Torah, master, is all justice without mercy; it is all copper and iron, inflexible laws; it is intended for the scholar, for the select. What message have you, master, for the entire House of Israel, for the woodchopper, butcher, tailor, and all unlearned Jews?" The *Zaddik* then led the teacher to the balcony and showed him the group of Ḥassidim on the lawn whose faces were bright and among whom joy reigned as they sang the tune of their *Zaddik*. It was a veritable joy of the Torah. The Rabbi of Brisk was impressed but not converted. Silently, master and disciple parted.

Perez idealized the melody (*Nigun*), the means of spiritualization in many ways and in numerous stories, monologues, and dialogues. In his *Mekubalim* (Mystics), he even attempts to classify the grades of tunes and avers that the highest type is the one without words, the music of the soul when the whole personality becomes one wordless song to God. However, the apotheosis of the melody is expressed in the story *A Gilgul fun a Nigun* (The Metamorphoses of a Melody). A melody, says Perez, is like a man, composed of body and soul. The tones and accords are the body but the soul is imparted by the singer. It is not the tones that matter but rather who emits them and for what purpose. "With the same bricks," says our author, "we can erect a synagogue, a mosque, a palace, a jail and a poorhouse. Hence, a *Nigun* may have many souls, may live and may die, and even be resurrected." Here is the story of the metamorphoses of a melody. In Machnowka, a town in Vohynia, there lived Ḥayyimel, the leader of the local orchestra, a pious Jew and a great musician. He was invited to play at the wedding of the daughter of the widow of Beril Krasner, the richest Jew in town. The expected guests belonged to the modern generation and Ḥayyimel was asked to play something extraordinary to accompany the memorial prayer recited at the ceremony. He went to the famous cantor, Padhozer in Berdichew, and obtained a melody which had been sung by the master at the wedding of a poor orphan. It did not please the modern guests, and one of them who was musically gifted began to whistle and changed the originally pious and modest melody into a wild passionate song. Later the melody was brought to the Yiddish theatre where it was saturated with

still more glowing passion. Still later, it was sung by a street comedian, a girl who had been kidnapped in her youth and had ultimately joined a wandering troupe of actors. The tune changed; it became sorrowful, it pleaded for mercy, for charity. Still later, this same girl becoming blind, wandered about in the streets with a hand-organ and sang the tune which had become even more sorrowful. A pious man, a scholar, who heard the song drove away the singer but could not forget the song. When he visited the *Zaddik* of Talna, he was asked to sing and involuntarily, unconsciously, he sang the organ-grinder's tune. It had assumed a new soul, the spirit of Torah had been injected into it. Soon the *Zaddik* himself caught the tune and endowed it with his soul. It became spiritualized and permeated with a spirit of sanctity, with the warmth of religiosity and with a longing for communion with God. It turned out that the blind girl was the daughter of Krasner's daughter at whose wedding *Hayyimel* sang *Padhozer's* song and that she had been kidnapped by wandering actors when a child.

The love of Israel and of fellowmen, which the best of the *Hassidic* leaders had emphasized, is immortalized in the following two stories, the motives of which Perez drew from Jewish folklore and polished to artistic finesse. These are *Oib Nisht Noch Hecher* (If Not Higher) and *Simḥah she be-Simḥah* (The Joy of Joys). In the first we are told how a Lithuanian *Mitnaged* doubted the stories of extreme piety told about the *Zaddik* of Nemirov. He decided to investigate and chose the night of the first recital of *Seliḥot* (The Penitential prayers offered every morning during the week preceding Rosh ha-Shanah) for the occasion. He hid beneath the bed of the *Zaddik* and waited. When the beadle knocked at the door of the house to arouse the sleepers to worship, the *Mitnaged* watched the actions of the Rabbi. The Rabbi rose, performed his ablutions, and then instead of donning his usual garments, he dressed in the garb of a peasant, girded himself with a rope, took an ax and left the house. The *Mitnaged* followed. The Rabbi entered the forest near the town, chopped some wood and cording it into a bundle, shouldered it and returned to town. Still following him, the investigator saw the *Zaddik* stop at a humble hut and tap on the window-pane. "Who is there?" cried the frightened voice of a sick Jewess. "Vassil," answered the Rabbi. "Which Vassil, and what do you want?" spoke the voice again. "I have wood to sell," said the peasant, and entering the house, he offered the wood to the sick widow. She protested that she had no money nor did she know when she

would have it to repay him. The Rabbi persuaded her to accept and even lighted the fire for her, and while laying the wood in the stove, he recited the first part of the *Selihot*; when the wood burned cheerily he recited the second part; and when the fire had burned down and warmth had spread through the house he concluded the third part. Henceforth the *Mitnaged*, when he heard people say of the *Zaddik* that he ascends to heaven every *Selihot* morning, used to add the words, "If not higher."

The famous *Zaddik*, Rabbi Levi Yizhak of Berdichew, whose fame as a lover of Israel is celebrated in legend, is the hero of the second story. It is told by another *Zaddik* who, while reciting the New Years prayers stopped in the middle and in vision ascended to heaven and saw the scenes enacted there. He saw the heavenly court in session and the sins and the merits of the Jews weighed in the balance. The year had been a bad one; the sins of the Jews were numerous, and the assistants of Satan carried heavy loads of sins endlessly into court. Satan rejoiced while the angels of defense sighed. Rabbi Levi Yizhak in Paradise heard the sigh, hastened to court, saw the load of sins, and without much ado seized them and threw them into the burning fires of hell. As he was throwing the last sack, he was caught by Satan who raised a hue and cry. He demanded that Levi Yizhak be sold as a slave for the theft in accordance with the law in Exodus, Ch. XXII, 2. The court reluctantly bowed to his will and the auction began. The pious of the ages endeavored to save Levi Yizhak and offered their good deeds, but in vain. Satan bid higher. When all seemed lost, a voice was heard from the Throne of Glory saying, "I, God, offer a world for Levi Yizhak and am buying him." "Then," concluded the *Zaddik*, "joy above joy reigned in the heavens."

Thus in numerous stories and sketches, each of which displays a different trait, does Perez reveal to us the soul of that deeply religious movement known as Hassidism. He gives expression to its inner striving, aspirations, and yearnings, and helps us to see its beauties which, as in all religious movements, are often hidden beneath an unattractive external cover.

Perez, even in his romantic and emotional tales always retains a realistic sense, and similarly in his more realistic portraits of Jewish ghetto life, there is always a romantic and emotional note. He left a volume of sketches and travel pictures from the days when he visited a large number of Jewish towns in Poland in order to collect statistical

data. These portraits are distinguished by their realism and by the accuracy with which the typical Jewish town, as it appeared in the nineties of the last century, is reflected in them, but they are also characterized by the trait peculiar to Perez, namely the penetrating glimpse into the souls of the characters. No psychological analysis, though he is master of that as evidenced by several of his stories dealing with double personalities, is displayed in those pictures for we are afforded only a glimpse of the men and women of these towns, but that glimpse is revealing and illuminating. There pass before us in the travel sketches, in rapid succession, scenes of a world long gone by, of the bitter struggle for existence, the squalor of poverty, the narrowness of the spiritual horizon, and the general pettiness. But amidst all these there shine forth the nobility of character, the good-natured innocence, and the intense love for their fellowmen displayed by many of the residents of these towns. We cannot help but sympathize with the Rabbi of Tishowitz whose highest goal of affluence is the expected raise in his salary of two gulden (15 cents) a week, for he is satisfied with little. We are certainly impressed with the Rabbi of Yarzew who is well satisfied with his position in that town for a number of reasons, one of them being the fact that his wife will no longer be jealous of other housewives who have meat for dinner even in the middle of the week. In Yarzew no one eats meat except on the Sabbath and thus equality is attained. He does not complain even when his little house is burned down, though it was not insured, for now he dwells in the synagogue proper and can study without interruption. And the *Rebbizin* of Skyla, who after living with the Rabbi for forty years, supports herself by the work of her own hands by "manufacturing" some potash, certainly displays nobility of character. She is happy in her work, for her sainted husband always respected one who enjoys the fruit of his own labor.

Perez wrote numerous dramas, but they are not of the popular type and were not intended either to amuse the people or to move them to pity. They have little action and are in the main dialogues or triologues or group conversations.

Many of the dramas, unlike most of his stories, reflect the modern epoch in Jewish life and its social problems. In them we hear the echo of the struggle between the workingmen and their employers; and we see the devastating effects of poverty upon Jewish family life and morals. The uglier side of poverty is brought out in the dramas more sharply than in the stories. Perez sympathized greatly with the poor and the downtrodden, and as indicated, was favorably inclined towards

the Jewish socialistic movement. Yet his artistic intuition forced him to see and to present the comic aspect of that movement in his short comedy, *Amol is Gewen a Melech* (Once there was a King). Its theme is a strike of the workers against an employer who is as poor as they are and the comical side of that movement in the ghetto as well as the childish naïveté of its leaders are fully projected through the delineation of the character of Gabriel, the organizer of the strike.

Several of the dramas have a mystic strain. Of these the most important is the *Die Goldene Keit* (The Golden Chain). Its theme is the struggle between romanticism and grim reality. The Hassidic tradition in a family of *Zaddikim* is symbolized by the Golden Chain. But that chain, strong as it was in the past, begins to snap when it comes in contact with the new world. As generations pass, each successor to the office of leader becomes spiritually weaker. A link of that chain, Leah, a daughter of Moishe, the third in line of the dynasty, breaks loose and finding the atmosphere in the ancestral home stifling, goes into the outside world. She follows her lover, Dr. Bergman, the apostle of reason and light, but she is disappointed and she comes back. "The light of knowledge," says she, "is cold." She comes back to the house of her parents searching for spiritual warmth but does not find it for doubt had entered the heart of her father. There is tragedy and pathos in the drama, but its purpose is not quite clear. There is still less clearness in the other symbolic dramas, especially in the one entitled *Bei Nacht Oifen Alten Mark* (At Night in the Market-Place).

The best of his dramas are the more realistic ones, where the motives of social injustice and the suffering of the poor play an important role. However, drama writing is not the forté of Perez. It is only an aspect of his manifold talent. We have thus reached the end of the survey of the literary heritage of Perez, and in conclusion we can say that we have hardly done justice to this many-colored and many-sided creative spirit. We have only indicated a few lines of its expression and given a few examples in which this poetic soul reflected itself. A full appreciation of this typically Jewish and intensely human writer can be gained only by reading his works in the language or languages (Hebrew or Yiddish) in which they were created.

66. *SHALOM ALEIKEM* (SHALOM RABINOWITZ)

About the same time that Perez turned to Yiddish as a medium for his literary expression, there appeared in the weekly *Yuddishes Folkblatt*, published by Zederbaum in St. Petersburg, the first sketches,

short stories, and feuilletons of another Yiddish writer whose influence on the Yiddish reading public was destined to exceed even that of Perez himself. That writer is Shalom Rabinowitz, better known by his pseudonym, Shalom Aleikem (1859-1916). Rabinowitz was born in Periyaslow, an important city in the province of Poltowa, in the Ukraine, but he spent his early years in the small town of Woronka whither his parents moved immediately after his birth. The typical Jewish life in this small town made an indelible impression upon the young Shalom and is reflected in almost all his stories, dramas, and novels. In fact, it is Woronka and its inhabitants, later metamorphized by the writer into Kasrilewka and its characters, which occupy such an important place in the works of Shalom Aleikem. His childhood passed in a comfortable and happy atmosphere, for during those years his father was a well-to-do man, but the wheel of fortune turned and the father moved back to Periyaslow where he became the owner of a small inn which proved unprofitable. Things changed quickly for young Shalom for on his return to the larger city he was forced to help in the management of the inn, serve the guests and perform many other menial labors. He even used to spend a number of hours each day in front of the inn inviting passers-by arriving in the near-by market-place to stop at their place. Matters grew worse when his mother died and his father remarried. He then suffered greatly at the hands of his bad-tempered stepmother. A change for the better came into his life when his father was persuaded to send his son to the gymnasium. There he distinguished himself in his studies and later began to earn some money by giving lessons with the result that he gained both prestige in the eyes of his father and stepmother and independence. On his graduation from the gymnasium, he procured a position as tutor in the house of a rich landowner, Elimelech Loew, where he spent three years. These years were happy ones for Shalom, for he lived in comfort and luxury, a life which was in great contrast to the poverty and struggle of former years. Besides, his relations with his pupil, the daughter of Loew, assumed a romantic aspect, for the two young people fell in love with each other. The incipient love, however, was soon terminated by the proud and rich father who discharged the daring teacher.

A few years later, Shalom Rabinowitz, at the age of twenty-one became government Rabbi in the town of Luben, and held the position for three years. During these years he made his first literary ventures

by publishing a number of correspondences and several articles in the Hebrew weekly, *ha-Meliz*. In 1883 he married his former pupil, the very heroine of his early romance, and thereupon gave up his position to help his father-in-law in the management of his estate. He stayed there for a short time and then moved to Byeloczerkov and ultimately to Kiew where for a number of years he plunged into all kinds of speculations, primarily those on the exchange. He thus experienced in his own life all the wild flights in the world of finance which he later typified in his famous character, Menahem Mendel. These adventures ended in 1890 in a crash and bankruptcy which caused Rabinowitz to move to Odessa. During all these years of financial adventures, he pursued his Yiddish writing as a hobby. He turned to Yiddish in 1883 when a copy of the *Yuddisches Folksblatt* fell into his hands and he became conscious of the existence of a literature in that language. But entertaining, as did most of the intellectuals of that day, a feeling of contempt for the uncultivated language of the masses, and considering writing in that language incompatible with his standing in the world of commerce and society, he chose to cover his passion for literary expression by the pen-name, Shalom Aleikem, the common form of greeting. Henceforth, he became a contributor to all Yiddish periodicals and his pseudonym became a popular one among the readers. The more he wrote in Yiddish, the greater his interest in the development of that literature became, and in 1888 he edited and published the first Yiddish literary annual, *Die Yiddische Folksbibliothek*, which formed a landmark in the history of Yiddish. Not only did the annual, as noted above, raise the literary standard of Yiddish writing but its material value as well, for Rabinowitz was the first publisher to pay for writing in that vernacular.

On coming to Odessa, Shalom Aleikem at first intended to devote himself to literature and make it a means of earning a livelihood. But conditions in Yiddish literature were not suitable for that purpose and he was forced, after several years of struggle, to return to Kiew and engage again in various business and commercial undertakings. When these too proved unsuccessful he again forsook in the year 1900 the world of commerce and henceforth became a professional Yiddish writer. Soon his works began to appear in various editions and his popularity grew daily. His literary fertility kept pace with the demand for his works and the name Shalom Aleikem became a household word in thousands of Jewish homes.

In 1905 Shalom Aleikem made a journey to the United States and on his way here visited the larger Jewish centers of Europe where he was well received by the Yiddish speaking masses. An enthusiastic reception was also given him in this country, and he immediately began to depict the new Jewish life on the American continent. A few years later he returned to Russia where he became affected with tuberculosis. He then left for Italy sojourning there for a few years, and with the outbreak of the War returned to New York where he spent his last years.

These variegated experiences of Rabinowitz to a great extent explain the nature and character of his writings, for only one who had himself experienced the various ups and downs of the checkered life of the Jews in Russia during the second half of the last century, who had the opportunity to observe it in all its aspects in the small town as well as in the large city, while mingling with all classes of society, could have so well depicted that colorful life. Still, his detailed descriptions and his ability to portray Jewish life are not his main contribution to Jewish literature. This lies, as is well known, in his remarkable humor. In fact, his very pen-name Shalom Aleikem indicates to a degree the significance of his talent and contribution for he brought peace of mind to his readers, the harassed masses of the Jews in Russia. He taught them to laugh, and very often at themselves, at their suffering, and at times, at the world surrounding them. This laughter liberated their souls from the oppressive feeling which the struggle for existence engendered in them and lifted the agony of numerous petty annoyances which weighed so heavily upon their hearts and gave them momentary peace. Shalom Aleikem was wont to call Mendele Moker Seforim *Der Zeide*, the grandfather, for he considered himself his literary grandchild, thus indicating the influence exerted by the first master of Yiddish literature upon his own creations. It would have been more proper if he had called the older writer father, for there is a very evident analogy in the writings of the two, and it is not impossible that during the early period of his career, Shalom Aleikem imitated Mendele. He himself acknowledges his indebtedness to the "grandfather" in his letter of dedication in one of his early novels, *Stempenu*. There are, of course, great differences, but there is no doubt that Mendele's works gave the younger writer the impetus to follow a certain literary direction.

Like Mendele, our writer excels more as an artist of Jewish collective

life, of the life of the masses, than of that of the individual. His characters are not, like those of Perez, selected individuals who are distinguished by their personality but are mainly types, the like of which was found by the thousands in the Jewish town. They are merely selected as representatives of the group. Nor does he seek to penetrate into the inner workings of the soul of his characters but is rather concerned with the external side of their life, with their general relation to the environment and the world around them. In his earlier attempts, in his period of novel writing, he strove to tell a more lengthy tale of the life of one or more characters and endeavored to delineate their personalities, but he was on the whole unsuccessful. Even in these novels we have more of the description of the environment and of the masses of which the characters are a part rather than of the characters themselves. It seems indeed that the characters are only a pretext for that general description. For this reason he employs a peculiar technique, infrequently met with in novels, which consists of long monologues by the author himself rather than a description or narration of the actions and thoughts of his characters. The author acts as the guide and Cicerone of the reader and tells him of the habits and ways of the masses, their likes and dislikes, and informs him ahead of the probable action of his characters. In this he was greatly influenced by Mendele, for the latter as the pen photographer of the Jewish life of a generation also acted as interpreter and employed the monologue form to a considerable extent.

He differs greatly, however, from Mendele in the extent of his world and his relation to his characters. The world of *Shalom Aleikem* is not the world of Mendele. True, *Kasrilewka*, the typical town of our writer much resembles the *Glupsk* of the former, and undoubtedly retains many of its characteristics, but time had also effected changes even in the life of *Kasrilewka*. The life depicted by Mendele is that of two generations ago, the age of the early *Haskalah*, while that depicted by our writer is that of the past generation. In that life there is no more struggle for enlightenment, no more evils of communal mismanagement, nor is there any place for the other problems with which the older writer grappled. The spirit of the times had penetrated even into the ghetto. Besides, Mendele's world is primarily static while that of *Shalom Aleikem* is both static and dynamic. He portrays *Kasrilewka* in its natural habitat and also *Kasrilewka* on the march, in transition, when its inhabitants leave their old home and go

into the larger cities, or even migrate to new lands and are in the process of adjusting themselves to new conditions. His world is also much wider for it embraces the city as well as the town and its life is more colorful, for it is more varied and complex. In it there are heard the echoes of new movements, new strivings and desires, and youth has a share in it, while the world and life depicted by Mendele, and to a great extent, even by Perez are primarily appropriated by men and women of middle and old age. In addition, neither the world of Mendele nor that of Perez is wholly secular. The former was more interested in portraying the social forms of Jewish life, and these forms two generations ago were inherently intermingled with religious ceremonies and values; and the latter endeavored, as we have seen, to project the sacred, the exalted, and the mystic in Jewish life. The case is different with Shalom Aleikem; his world is wholly secular. He is not in search of the exalted, the ideal or the exotic, but is interested in the everyday life of his characters, in the prosaic conditions of their existence, in their habits, ways, and manners as they are reflected in the market-place, at home, at gatherings, assemblies, and meetings, in times of joy or sorrow.

The difference is still greater in regard to the writer's relation to his characters. Neither Mendele nor Perez are a part of the world and life they describe. They occupy a distinct place in it or rather outside of it, and observe it objectively. The former, who was imbued with the ideals of the Haskalah, aimed to instruct his readers and to improve Jewish life, and hence the distance between himself and the characters he describes is always in evidence. He looks at them from above and while his heart may feel their suffering and his sympathy for their struggle may be deep and genuine, he nevertheless depicts their frailties and the pattern of their lives more in a vein of satire than of humor. Perez, as we have seen, is in search of the exalted and the rare, and hence his characters are either deeply tragic or distinguished by their personality. And when they happen to lack these qualities, their defects are delineated in no less a satiric, though more subtle, vein than that of Mendele. Shalom Aleikem, on the other hand, is a part of the world and the life he describes; he does not contemplate them from above, nor does he moralize, nor does he search for the exceptional in them. He portrays what he sees and what goes on in the daily life around him. What raises him above his characters is his artistic talent and the ability to see life in its wider and more extensive

aspect. This art is of a plastic nature and does not penetrate very deeply into the recesses of the Jewish soul, but it is deep enough to present life in all its incongruities and contradictions, and to produce Shalom Aleikem's brand of humor, for it is these qualities which constitute the essence of humor.

Were life to run like a machine, well-oiled and perfectly constituted, there would hardly be any place for humorous incidents, and literatures would be mere descriptions of it of more or less correct nature. Again, were life a jumble of happenings without order, system, or plan, there would also be little place for humor, for in a hurly-burly world where almost anything can occur, no event, no matter how strange would ever have surprised anybody or evoked a smile. The case though is different. Though life flows, on the whole, in accordance with a certain plan and order, it very often also plays tricks and pranks with us and treats us to unexpected and sudden turns contrary to our expectations and calculations. It is in these twists and turns that humor is inherent. The humorous event is in its essence the unexpected according to the notions we have of life, or more exactly, the thing which is incongruous with our habits, views, and notions. An event is humorous, even if it possesses a tragic element, as long as it is not deeply tragic, for the essence of tragedy is, like that of humor, the unexpected and the incongruous. The difference between the two is only a matter of emphasis. The humorist is not unaware of the tragic aspect of life, but being essentially an optimist, he detaches the humorous event from the tragic and portrays it to the fullest extent, while the tragic aspect is only implied or referred to indirectly.

Jewish life in general, and especially the life of the Russian ghetto of a generation ago, with its insecurity, the restrictions of the government, the basislessness of the occupations of the Jews, and the numerous other conditions which contributed to its abnormality abounded in incongruities and hence was replete with humorous incidents and events. But the very same conditions always attached a tragic element to Jewish humor, so that in fact we are often in doubt when reading of a description of an incongruous event whether to laugh or to cry. It is then that the humorist comes to our assistance and detaches the humorous from the tragic and emphasizes the first and evokes laughter. But still that humor never loses its tragic element, for it lurks beneath the surface, and hence Jewish humor, as represented by talented writers, is always a kind of *Galgenhumor*. In fact, the Jew, in order

to live and to survive the bitter struggle for existence had to be a humorist for had he penetrated to the depths of his tragic life, he would have been frightened at the difficulty of the struggle and would have been hampered in his endeavors. This sense of humor latent in the average Jew of the ghetto, even in the denizens of Kasrilewka, awaited the hand of the master to present it in artistic and literary fashion and we are thus treated to the delightful, though not un-painful, stories of Shalom Aleikem wherein the Jews laugh at their own suffering and tribulations with the characteristic optimism developed in them through a long life in exile.

Furthermore, the peculiar life of the Jews in the ghetto engendered in them also certain characteristics and traits which are often the primary cause of numerous incongruous actions, which are consequently humorous. These aspects of Jewish life were masterfully delineated by our writer in many stories, always with an eye to brighten that life and evoke a hearty laugh at its foibles, tricks, and pranks. Shalom Aleikem thus depicted in his stories, sketches, and comedies the principal traits of the psychology of the average Jew or even of the masses as a whole, as far as they were displayed in everyday life in the struggle for existence and in relation to the environment.

The reflection of these traits and peculiarities is distributed over a wide range of literary productions, but it can best be traced in three groups of stories which to my mind constitute the principal works of Shalom Aleikem and express his art and talent at their best. The first of these is *Ganz Tewia der Milchiger* (Tobias the Dairyman). The group of stories, in which Tewia, the representative of the more stable and solid part of the Jewish masses who best reflects their views on life, plays the main role, was not written by Shalom Aleikem at one time but over a number of years beginning with 1895 and ending with 1915. He returned to his favorite type again and again at different periods and times. He was thus able to mirror the various changes caused by inner and external conditions which affected Jewish life in Russia at different times. In the series of monologues—a favorite form of our author—the life of Tewia in all its vicissitudes and phases are unrolled before us. At the time of his revelation, Tewia appears in the role of a dairyman who lives in a village not far from a summer resort named Boyberik where the rich Jews of Yehupetz (Kiew) spend their vacations. He supplies milk, cream, and cheese to the resorters and thus earns his living. Previous to that, though, he was

only a teamster engaged in delivering logs from the lumber camp to the railroad station. A fortunate incident which brought him a few extra roubles enabled him to acquire several cows and become a dairyman. In the village he is isolated from the Jews and is far from the synagogue and house of study, yet he is not only pious but thoroughly immersed in a religious atmosphere. He prides himself on his knowledge of the Bible and Midrash and constantly quotes verses and proverbs from both, but in such a distorted and misapplied fashion that he arouses the continuous laughter of the readers. His stories taken together are really a tale of woe replete with many tragic incidents, but they are told in such a nonchalant and almost cheerful manner that we forget their tragic content and enjoy their vivacity, optimism, and humor. He has five daughters, all very beautiful and brilliant. He expects them to marry rich husbands but his hopes are doomed to disappointment. The oldest marries a poor tailor, a match which he considers beneath his dignity and a blow to his aspirations. The second falls in love with a young revolutionary who, a few days after the wedding, is arrested and sentenced to exile in Siberia whither she follows him never to return. The third daughter follows her Gentile lover and even embraces his religion. The fourth daughter drowns herself as a result of an unfortunate love affair with the son of a rich resorter. The youngest, more practical, marries a rich broker whom she does not love in order to help the family. The rich son-in-law is ashamed of his father-in-law's trade and contrives to send him away to Palestine, but the unexpected happens; he loses his money and emigrates together with his wife to America. Tewia goes back to his old trade as dairyman and at the age of seventy supports his widowed daughter with her children. All these events are climaxed by his expulsion from the village by the decree of the government after he had already suffered a mild pogrom on his house and property. Tragic as the content of the tales are, they are permeated with a spirit of humor and optimism, for Tewia is optimistic, carries his burden lightly, lives in a world full of quotations, has confidence in his God, and laughs at his own tribulations though his heart often contracts with pain.

Much of the humor of these tales consists in the form, namely in the language used by Tewia, his interpretation of verses and Midrashic statements which are incongruous and contradictory, and in the numerous *bon mots* which in the mouth of Tewia have a peculiar and queer significance. Such expressions, "I was with God's help a poor

man," or "I die of hunger three times a day" are bound to call forth a smile for they are contradictory in themselves, and the tales bristle with such expressions drawn from the rich folklore of the masses. This type of humor is peculiar to the language and cannot be translated. There is, though, in the tales a more stable and universal humor inherent in the situations themselves, of which the following can serve as illustrations. Tewia is invited by a rich butcher, Leizer Wolf, to discuss with him the delicate subject of concluding a match with his oldest daughter. He, on the other hand, knows nothing of the butcher's intentions but thinks that the latter wants to buy one of his cows. A conversation develops in which Leizer Wolf speaks of the girl while Tewia interprets his words as referring to the cow. Still more humorous is the pogrom on Tewia's house. On returning from the resort, Tewia finds a large group of excited peasants headed by the elders surrounding his house. To his question, what is their wish, the leading elders answer that they came to beat him. "Why?" asks Tewia. The elder then confesses that they have nothing against him but that they are afraid lest the government will punish them if there will be no pogrom in their village since pogroms are taking place in many other villages. They must, at least, break his windows. Tewia attempts to stave off the imminent calamity by a device. He proposes to the peasants to rely on the decision of the holy psalter, namely he will open the book and pronounce the first word his eye will meet and if they will be able to repeat it, their will shall be done and the pogrom shall take place. But if they will be unable to pronounce it, they must give up their intention. The peasants agree to the proposal and the word, *we-Halaklakot* is chosen. They attempt to repeat it but in vain. Tewia wins but the peasants are not satisfied. They insist that a pogrom in any form must take place in order not to shame the village. They advise him to break a few windows himself and they then ask him for some whiskey and drink to his health. The humor in the situation is quite evident and reflects both the stupidity of the Russian peasants and the peculiar adjustment to the environment the Jew had to make in order to survive. Tewia, in his cheerfulness, witticism, and sharp-mindedness is representative of the Jewish masses who, though often escaping by a hair's breadth from danger are yet able to laugh at their own suffering and fate.

The second group of stories, written in the form of letters exchanged between the principal character, Menaḥem Mendel, and his wife was

composed during a number of years between 1892 and 1909. Menaḥem Mendel is also a representative type of a large group of Jews whose insecure means for making a living, vivid imagination, and winged phantasy causes them to plunge into all kinds of adventures and speculative undertakings. These, of course, end in failure and disaster; but the undaunted spirit, the everlasting faith and optimism of these Jews are not crushed and they try again and again. Such Menaḥem Mendels abounded in Russian Jewry and still abound in the thousands. Menaḥem Mendel of the story, when he is revealed to us, is a young man recently married, who journeys from Kasrilewka to Kishenew to collect his wife's dowry from her uncle. His intention is to return to his home town and open a small store with the money. But on his way home he stops at Odessa and there he is caught in the maelstrom of speculation sweeping around the local exchange. Without experience and with little money, he plunges into financial adventures. His vivid phantasy pictures before him golden dreams of riches and luxury, and with childish naïveté he promises his wife in his letters all kinds of costly presents. Failure after failure does not deter him. In vain does his more practical wife beg him to return home; she even sends him traveling expenses, but the Don Quixote of finance takes his wife's money and goes to Yehupez (Kiew) to try his luck at the exchange and even essays adventures at Warsaw. When the last penny is gone he begins to go the round of chance occupations. He becomes, in succession, broker at the exchange, an agent for sugar manufacturers, for money lenders, and a broker of estates, factories, and coal mines, and of course, fails in all for he is really no authorized agent; his representation is imaginative and he has no conception of the things he is supposed to sell. As a result his transactions are replete with humorous incidents. He ultimately turns writer and failing in that he becomes a *Shadkan* (Marriage broker), and ultimately an insurance agent. In all these occupations, the hero commits blunder after blunder as a result of his innocence, inexperience, and flighty imagination. There is much humor in the language of the stories, but still more in the situations resulting from precipitated actions of Menaḥem Mendel of which the following is a typical illustration. In his role of *Shadkan*, Menaḥem Mendel, in partnership with a fellow broker, attempts to conclude a match between the children of two rich families of different cities. He works at one end of the proposition and his partner at the other end. When all negotiations are concluded and the

supposed parties meet, it turns out that the match is between two girls, for the hasty *Shadkanim* forgot to ascertain the sex of their prospects. Many comical incidents are also related in the letters of the wife who in spite of the curses she rains upon her unlucky husband, cannot restrain herself from informing him regularly of the events transpiring in Kasrilewka.

The third principal work of Shalom Aleikem, *Motel, Peise dem Hazon's* (Motel, the son of Peise, the Cantor), though apparently a continuous work, is in reality a group of stories. Each chapter is essentially a separate story and the only connection is that Motel Peise's, after whom the book is named, is the narrator of each. However, he himself is not the principal character, for this work which consists of two parts, one written in 1907 and the other in 1915, after an interval of eight years, is really a series of group portraits and delineates numerous characters. In it the writer undertook to picture the Kasrilewka of later years, when changes had entered its life. The larger part of the book is, therefore, devoted to a description and portrayal of the migration of the sons of Kasrilewka to the United States, their adventures on the road, and their initial steps in adjustment to a new life. This mass immigration and the life of the emigrants, their visits in the various cities of Western Europe on their way to the coveted land bristle with humorous and comic incidents which arise both from their maladjustment to new conditions and from their reaction to a new world which confuses and bewilders them. The characters possess the traits of his main heroes, Tewia and Menaḥem Mendel. Eliyahu, the brother of Motel, the narrator, is of the same calibre as Menaḥem Mendel, though on a smaller scale. He is also full of schemes, and is constantly in search of new patents and inventions in order to manufacture certain articles, and he too invariably meets with failure. Pini, the friend of Eliyahu, is a kind of dreamer of the ghetto, the new type of *Maskil*. Motel himself who, during the entire narrative, remains a child, reflects much of the psychology of Jewish children of the ghetto, portrayed masterfully by our writer in his stories for children. He does, however, typify the essential Jewish characteristic of optimism. His oft-repeated maxim which serves as a caption of one of his stories, "Mir is gut, ich bin *a Yosem* (I am Happy, I am an Orphan) sums up his attitude towards life. He found happiness in the kindness people displayed toward him when he was an orphan

though he often went hungry. This work filled a need in Jewish literature for it threw light upon a corner of Jewish life in modern times little dealt with by writers, the life of the Jews in the process of migration.

Shalom Aleikem was a prolific writer and the number of his short stories, sketches, comedies, and feuilletons fill many volumes. In all of them, though, we can detect variations of the fundamental traits of the Jewish character which was described by us above. Jewish life, due to the peculiar conditions of the dispersion, is multi-colored, and in different places and times assumes a variety of phases and aspects. This diversity enabled the writer who knew that life extensively to reflect particles of it in his numerous stories, and at times he succeeded in projecting the humor of the aspects of that life more effectively in the limited space of a sketch than in a larger work. The story, *Finf un Sibezig Toisend* (Seventy-five Thousand) illustrates more clearly the grotesqueness of the flights of phantasy of the Menaḥem Mendel type than the entire series of letters bearing his name. A Jew, Yakob Yosel by name tells his tale. He was in need of funds and was forced to obtain a loan from a money lender, giving a lottery ticket as security with the condition that if not redeemed within five months, it would be forfeited. Yakob Yosel failed to redeem his pledge in time. One fine day he saw the list of lottery winners and it seemed to him that his ticket had drawn seventy-five thousand roubles. He rushed to the lender, paid the loan and interest hoping that the latter had forgotten the condition. However, not being able to restrain himself any longer, Yakob Yosel told the lender that the ticket had won a large sum, and the latter, though not laying claim to the money, yet hesitated to return the ticket, but offered to deposit it with a trustee. Thenceforth, the matter became more complex. It turned out that the borrower's brother, Henik, was a partner to the ticket, and furthermore, that it was not his, but belonged to a priest who had given it to Henik to use as a pawn for money he intended to borrow. All parties now became interested: the brothers, the lender, the trustee, and of course, the priest. It took months to unravel the legal skein, and finally when that was done and the entire group came to the bank to take the money and divide it among themselves, it was disclosed that Yakob Yosel was mistaken and that the ticket had not won. The winning number was not 2298 but 2289, and thus the excitement, the eagerness, and anxiety

which stirred the inhabitants of two towns for months was all in vain, and all because Yakob Yosel in his imagination saw his ticket as the winning one.

The story of *Die Grosse Beholoh fun die Kleine Menshelach* (The Terror of the Small Men) telling of the flight of the Jews of two towns in fear of a pogrom, not only reflects a tragic phase of Jewish life—the fears in this case were ungrounded—but also illustrates its grim humor. The refugees met half way, and it turned out that each group was running towards the opposite town. There was no intention on the part of either to seek protection from the Jews of the other town; they merely fled, without intention or plan. And had they not met, there would have resulted an exchange of Jews of the two towns which would, of course, have made little difference to the perpetrators of the pogroms, had a pogrom been intended.

Shalom Aleikem wrote a considerable number of comedies, but, on the whole, his dramatic productions are not on the same level as his short stories or the three principal works. The leading motive in most of his dramas is the maladjustment of his characters to their new environment. The themes are mostly drawn from the life of the *nouveau riche* and the characters are sons of Kasrilewka who had become rich and moved to the city and had unsuccessfully sought to adapt themselves to a new type of life. A secondary but an important motive is the rift between the children and the parents. The younger generation is already influenced by the new ideas current in general as well as in Jewish life, such as socialism and Zionism. The parents hardly understand the nature of these movements and are confused and bewildered at the conduct of their children. Both of these motives provide good material for dramatic action and psychological conflict, but Shalom Aleikem was not equal to the task. He only saw the comic aspect of the maladjustment and the conflict between the generations, and this he represented in his characteristic manner, more by speech than by action. Much of the humor of these dramas lies in the language employed by the characters. In general, our writer was more at home in the world of the sons of Kasrilewka than in that of their grandsons. He saw the comic side of the new life of the masses which began to take shape in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the present century, but he did not grasp the full import of the movements and problems which influenced and motivated that life.

Several of his comedies attempt to portray Jewish life in this country but they are not of great importance.

Shalom Aleikem wrote a number of children's stories which were collected in a separate volume. The Jewish child occupies an important role in his works. The portrayal of childhood is also given much space in his other works, such as in *Motel, Peise dem Hazon's* and in his autobiographical novel, *Fun Yarid* (Return from the Fair). In this portrayal, Shalom Aleikem succeeded in emphasizing the conflict in the life of the Jewish child of the small town between his own desires and passions and the stereotyped, standardized norms of community life. The revolt of the child against the narrowness of the life pattern of his environment is masterfully depicted by the writer.

The last work of Shalom Aleikem was the above-mentioned *Fun Yarid*. The name is symbolic and signifies the analogy of human life to a fair, for in both we are often more profoundly moved by the hubbub which surrounds us and the external causes which push us in a certain direction than by inner motives and reflections. It was his intention to tell the story of his life in all its changes and colorfulness, but the work was interrupted by his death and was carried only to the early twenties of his life. In this work we have little of his humor, but we are compensated by a fine sympathetic description of Jewish life in all its variety as it was lived in the typical Jewish town a half a century ago.

The world of Shalom Aleikem is dead, and the changes which have entered into Jewish life by force of circumstances are numerous and fundamental. Yet the characters introduced in his works still exist though in a much metamorphosed form, and his brilliant and delightful portrayals not only entertain but offer us too a glimpse into the soul of the Jew.

67. OTHER NOVELISTS AND SHORT STORY WRITERS

Mendele, Perez, and Shalom Aleikem were the three luminaries of the Yiddish literature, which began to develop in the eighties of the last century. It is their works which gave an impetus to its advancement and modernization. But there were others, novelists and short story writers who also contributed to that literature and helped to make it the full-bodied literature that it was at the outbreak of the War, and their services must not be overlooked.

i. One of the earlier novelists whose popularity in the eighties exceeded even that of Perez and Shalom Aleikem was Jacob Dinnesohn (1859). He made his literary debut in 1876 when he published his first novel which, in the manner of the time, bore a Hebrew title *ha-Neheabim we-ha-Neimim* (The Beloved and the Pleasant, with reference to II Samuel, I, 23) and a subtitle in Yiddish *Der Schwarzer Yungermanchik* (The Dark Young Man). He subsequently wrote a number of others, among them *Hershele, Eben Negef* (The Stumbling Stone), *Alter*, and ultimately *Yosele*. With the exception of the last, his earlier novels all belong to the type of folk stories and represent a transitional stage between the grotesque romances of Shomer and his school and the later more realistic and more literary novels. His themes are drawn from Jewish life and reflect that life in its incipient state of change. Love is the axis around which his stories revolve, but most of his novels, contrary to the usual tradition of such productions where the happy ending is the rule, end in failure and frustration. The lovers are either separated by villains or die young. The heroes are students of the *Yeshibah* who fall in love with daughters of rich and pious Jews. The students, moved by the desire for enlightenment, leave the *Yeshibah* and go to larger cities to prepare themselves for the university. The aims of the lovers are frustrated either through the machinations of bad men who are interested in separating the lovers for their own purposes, or by the interference of parents to whom love is generally an unworthy thing. In their endeavors to frustrate the loves of the young people, the villains and the parents stoop to low means, such as false accusations or turning the young men over to military service. We have then in Dinnesohn's novels the whole complex which was the staple content of the Hebrew Haskalah novels. Nor is the general Haskalah motive lacking in the writer's stories. He endeavors to moralize and point out the defects in Jewish life in long discourses. There is little unity and still less character analysis, but much sentimentalism and emotional scenes. It is these traits which made the novels popular among the masses for whom they were intended.

Yosele is of a higher calibre. The theme is primarily the life of the poor in the ghetto. The principal character is Yosele and the story of his young life which ends abruptly, forms the content. The trials of the poor Jewish child who suffers hunger, has no roof over his head, and is deeply mortified by social humiliation are skilfully delineated and not without psychologic insight. This novel marks a turning

point in Dinnesohn's literary production, a change from romanticism to realism. This change was in accordance with the spirit of the time, for at the turn of the century, Yiddish like Hebrew literature, turned completely from the themes and motives of the Haskalah, approached closer to life, and began to reflect it in all its aspects.

ii. Mordecai Spector (1859-1922) is another leading novelist of the eighties and nineties of the last century. He began his literary work in 1884 with a novel entitled a *Roman Ohn a Namen* (A Novel Without a Name) and followed it with a number of others. His themes are also drawn from Jewish life, but the type of life he reflected was that of later times when modern forms had entered the ghetto and European customs, manners, and fashions were no longer a novelty. The novels, however, retain many characteristics of the earlier folk productions. Their construction is poor and things happen accidentally at the will of the author who multiplies the episodes in order to make the story more intriguing and effective. Moreover, they have a certain tendency. In several of them, especially in *Der Juddisher Erd Arbeiter* (The Jewish Farmer), he propagates the ideal of the return to the soil, not in the lands of the Diaspora where Jewish life and property are not secure, but in Palestine. We hear there the echo of the events of the times, particularly the effects of the pogroms in Russia on Jewish life. In his later novels, published at the beginning of the present century, new characters appear, young men and women who had at first been swept away by the centrifugal movement and who had estranged themselves from Jewish life but had now returned to their people after many disappointments.

With all his defects as a novelist, Spector possesses a sense for realistic description and the life of the town is accurately described in many of his longer stories. This sense of realism is especially marked in his short stories where he is at his best.

Spector also contributed to the development of Yiddish literature by acting as editor and publisher of the annual, *Der Hois Freind* (The House Friend), an annual which appeared for a number of years and in which talented writers participated, among them many whose literary activity was mainly carried on in Hebrew.

The novels of Dinnesohn and Spector found few imitators among the writers of the day. The taste of both the readers and writers improved, and themes of the type presented by these writers were out of fashion; Jewish life changed rapidly; a young generation grew up with

new ideals, struggled with new problems, and were the bearers of new movements. This life clamored for expression, but in view of its fragmentary form and complexity, it could not be delineated on a large scale in a long novel, nor were the writers equal to the task. The short story and the sketch were more appropriate and formed a more suitable literary expression for the time. To these factors we must add the influence of Perez and Shalom Aleikem who distinguished themselves in this field of literary endeavor. As a result there arose in the first decade of the present century a number of short story writers who expressed themselves with more or less success. The most distinguished of these writers were Abraham Reizen and H. D. Nomberg.

iii. Reizen, who distinguished himself as a Yiddish poet (Sec. 72), wrote a large number of short stories and sketches during the first decade of the present century which were later collected in a number of volumes. His stories are divided into two groups, those which are drawn from the life of the town, and those which deal with the life of the city as reflected in the vicissitudes of the former inhabitants of the town who had migrated to the larger centers. Reizen, who was born and raised in a small Lithuanian town and who in his youth suffered the pangs of poverty, always carried with him the impress of that life and in his stories expressed deep sympathy for the poor whose life is one round of struggle, disappointment, and ceaseless effort to satisfy the most elemental needs. It is the struggles and the numerous petty tragedies of that life which are portrayed by Reizen in the stories of the first group.

The primary characteristics of this writer are simplicity, brevity, and straightforwardness. Reizen does not moralize nor does he employ any subtle psychological analysis to uncover the souls of his characters. He merely relates incidents and episodes, but these episodes speak for themselves, and like a flash of lightning, illuminate the dark horizon of the life of these characters. We thus have a series of little tragedies. We participate in the sorrow of the cantor who lost his voice, in the anxiety of Hayyim Yankel, the tailor, the owner of the only tree in the long street of the town, at seeing his tree slowly wither, and we sympathize with Hanan, the grain-dealer, who is tortured by qualms of conscience because he had mixed several sacks of a low grade of rye in the grain he had sold to the rich merchant. It was Hanan's first offense, committed so that he might be able to pay the tuition for his

only son who attends the *Heder*, for the price offered by the merchant meant a loss instead of a profit.

The themes of the second group of stories are drawn from the life of young people who migrated to the city. They are maladjusted to their new environment and their struggle for existence is hard and bitter. We have, therefore, another series of little tragedies. A number of stories possess special interest for they portray certain phases of the spread of the socialist idea in the ranks of the Jewish proletariat. The awakening of class consciousness among the naïve, simple workingmen in the Jewish communities of the Pale of Settlement had its humorous aspect. Some of these new converts were confused and bewildered by the jumble of words and ideas dinned in their ears by the intellectual propagandists. They were perplexed as to their attitude towards their employers whom but yesterday they had respected and looked up to and today were taught to hate. In one of the stories a young convert grapples with a grave problem. He was taught to hate his employer and all others of the capitalist class. But, notwithstanding the instruction, he greatly admires the beautiful daughter of his employer who, from time to time, visits the small factory of her father. He loves her though he knows she will never return his affection of which she is not even aware. But he is uncertain whether he, a proletarian, is allowed to love the daughter of a capitalist. He finally turns to the leader of the socialist group of which he is a member and propounds his query—a new type of *Shealah*. Only after the all-wise leader permits the proletarian to entertain such feelings does the convert regain his peace of mind and continues to silently love the beautiful, rich girl.

iv. Nomberg's stories deal primarily with the life of the younger generation in the city. His characters are young people who, having lost their moorings, were torn away from the traditions of their people and the old form of life, and swept by the new spirit, were tossed into a new environment. They are the same type that we frequently meet in the stories and sketches of the modern Hebrew writers. Their outlook upon life is, on the whole, gloomy and morose, and their end is frequently tragic. His description is realistic with an attempt at psychological analysis. Nomberg added but little in his Yiddish stories to what he had already expressed in his Hebrew ones. In fact, a large number of his stories are translations from the Hebrew. His main contribution to the development of Yiddish literature is his emphasis upon the secular aspect of the new life of the younger generation.

68. *SHALOM ASH*

In the works of Shalom Ash who is still in the midst of his literary activity, Yiddish belles-lettres made a great stride forward. Not only is he the most prolific of Yiddish writers—for the number of volumes of his collected works already exceeds thirty—but he is also the most versatile of them. He is equally at home in the short story, the long novel of contemporary life, the drama, and the historical novel. He is the portrayer of the kaleidoscopic Jewish life during the last thirty-five years in all its numerous hues. All the changes which entered into it as a result of the recent world events, such as the rise of the radical movement among the Jews of Russia, the World War, the Russian Revolution, and other causes find expression in his work. Furthermore, his canvas is large and wide.

Like many Yiddish and Hebrew writers, Ash hails from a town in Poland where he acquired his education and spent his youth. But he traveled much, saw much, received various impressions, and fell under different influences. He observed Jewish life in the town and in the city, in Eastern and Western Europe, and also in America. All that he saw, observed, and perceived he attempted to present in his works. His canvas is, therefore, as wide as the world and as large as the modern Jewish Diaspora. Ash is endowed with an exceptional creative power which constantly searches for new fields of activity, and at times, when contemporary Jewish life seems exhausted and affords no episodes worthy of portraying, he turns to the past and draws upon the rich history of the Jews for themes and motives for his works and produces his historical novels and dramas. Thus, time and space hold no barrier for him, and the variety of Jewish life, mainly contemporary but to a great extent also that of the past, is portrayed and illuminated by his masterful pen.

Due to his great versatility and productivity it is difficult to determine the fundamental characteristics of his creative spirit. Like the life described by him, Ash's genius is many-sided. He is simultaneously romantic, idealistic, and realistic, as well as subjective and objective. He often attempts to give a psychological analysis of the inner life of his numerous characters and succeeds to a certain degree. Yet the portrait of the individual is not his forté. His strength lies in drawing the composite picture of the life of the group. He is more keen in

penetrating to the essence of the collective spirit than in exploring the recesses of the soul of the individual. In fact, many of his main characters are in reality types and are employed more as a means of supplying unity to the numerous episodes which portray a certain phase of life than as ends in themselves. Their own life story, therefore, often becomes of secondary import and is designed not to reveal the struggles of an individual but merely to illuminate the general picture. This, however, does not mean that Ash is unable to delineate the life of the individual. On the contrary, he possesses psychological insight, and in a large number of his stories, especially the shorter ones, the inner life of the characters is revealed to its depth and with great skill. The emphasis, though, in the greater part of his works, is laid on the life of the group and the description of the environment.

Ash resembles Mendele in a way, for like him, he reflects the manners, thoughts, and feelings of the Jewish group, and like him, he describes in a number of his works the static phase of that life which in the past assumed a definite form and shape. But he is less objective and less general in his description than Mendele and his relation to the world and the life he describes is warmer and more intimate. Mendele often describes his group with the coldness of a naturalist and with a good deal of irony, only occasionally displaying sympathy with its state. Ash is not only always in sympathy with the life of the people he describes, but really displays a personal interest in and an affinity with it. Mendele always intends to instruct, while Ash has no purpose but to portray, and even recreate the spirit which animated that life. All that has been said, however, applies primarily to his stories of the town and of the historical novels. The case is different in his stories of the life of the city. In these he is more objective, more realistic, and is less identified with the life he delineates.

Another important characteristic of the novelist is the poetic spirit which permeates his work. Not only does he have numerous poetic descriptions of nature and deeply pathetic episodes and incidents, but many of his stories are enveloped in a poetic halo which carries the reader away from the prosaic world in which he moves into a world spiritually more perfect, more harmonious, and more complete. As a rule, this world is either of the distant or of the near past, before it began to disintegrate. But even in the contemporary life of the Jew with its constant change and transition from state to state Ash finds

episodes and moments which retain the quaintness and peculiar charm of old and he points them out to the reader, and thus imparts to him the poetic quality which he himself sees in life.

In general, there are to be discerned four stages or phases in Ash's numerous works. These are to be distinguished by the type of life described there. Like most of the Yiddish writers, he began with portrayals of the static type of life of the town. He began in 1900 under the influence of Perez and the lesser short story writers with sketches from the life of the town in which Ḥassidic types predominate. Like Perez, Ash felt the poetic content of the old and static type of Jewish life beneath the grim external crust and saw in Ḥassidism its finer expression. Simultaneously, though, he noted the bitter struggle going on in that life, its poverty and suffering, and consequently the early stories are permeated with a spirit of helplessness and sorrow. However, his innate optimism and healthy outlook upon life caused him to turn away from the path of sorrow and suffering, and to look deep into the life of the town in its patriarchal form. He then saw before him a different picture, a life which, in spite of its narrowness and seclusion, is yet full of harmony and idealism and possesses a beauty of its own. He undertook to delineate that life on a larger scale as a complete entity and not as heretofore in fragments, in his first large work, *A Stedtel* (A Town).

This work which can be considered among the best of Ash's novels is practically an apotheosis of the patriarchal life of the Polish Jewish town as it was lived before the storms of the times reached it. It is hardly a novel in the proper sense of the word but a composite picture of the life of a group of people which was cast in a definite mould, hallowed by tradition and stabilized by the experiences of ages. It is portrayed through the story of a leading family of the town, the head of which is Ezekiel Gumbiner, a rich merchant, distinguished by his piety, generosity, and hospitality. The picture which embraces the life of the town during three quarters of a year, beginning with spring and ending with early fall, is a bright one. We miss there the degrading episodes of poverty and the pathetic incidents of the struggle for existence. Instead, we see the calmness and the peace of mind of people who are well adjusted to their environment and whose soul is little troubled by fear, insecurity, and the uncertainty of the future, for it is fortified by a trust and faith in God, which enables the group to follow its path in life with a definite steadfastness.

Employing the life of the family of Ezekiel Gumbiner as an axis around which the group of portraits revolves, Ash paints one idyllic picture after another. We feel the charm of a late afternoon in the summer when the youth of the town take their daily walk along the road guarded by tall trees, and the toilers, both the men and the women, sit down to rest around their houses, and the air is filled with voices humming sacred and secular songs intermingled with the sorrowful melody of a diligent student in the synagogue. This is followed by a picture less idyllic but not less interesting of the hustle and bustle on a Friday in the town when all are hastening to usher in the queen Sabbath. The queen herself appears to us in full glory of rest, dignity, and calm, and she takes an equally majestic farewell from the town on Saturday night. These scenes are succeeded by charming descriptions of the month of *Elul* with its spirituality saturating the very atmosphere, the "fearful days" themselves, the festive days of Succoth succeeding them, and finally the prosaic days of fall in which life once more assumes its grayish drab color. All these changes and nuances reflected in the life of the group as a whole are not only depicted in their many colors but joined into an harmonious whole, the beauty of which is enhanced by the poetic descriptions of the natural environment of the town, including the mighty Vistula on whose shores it nestles, and the green forests surrounding it.

With this work Ash did not take leave of the town. He was too rooted in it, his soul still fluttered between its walls, and he drew much of his spiritual sustenance from its life. He was to return to it again and again. Meanwhile change entered into the life of the town, and the patriarchal idyllic life began to disintegrate. New types appeared, the lower stratum of the population rose to activity, broke the old bonds, and trod new paths, paths which were not always straight. The life of the workers, the butchers, drivers, and teamsters began to assume definite form and shape. It was distinguished by a materialism, a glorification of physical prowess and strength, and an attitude of fortitude and fearlessness toward the world. Almost every town had its street where this new stratum of Jewish society made its abode. Most of its inhabitants kept within the bounds of the law, but some went beyond it, and thus even the "town" had its miniature underworld. This new life also demanded expression and Ash undertook the task.

In a number of stories, written simultaneously with the above work, the new types appear. The main characters are Jews who have already

outgrown the old type of life, and who are separated by a gulf from the more respectable citizens of the ghetto. The latter look down upon these strong-fisted, rough, and broadshouldered brethren of theirs, yet it happens on occasion that the gulf is bridged when one of the lower stratum succeeds in his undertakings and accumulates capital, for his money brings him closer to the upper class who may be in need of his support. Such is the case of Mates in the story, *Die Yatische Tochter* (The Daughter of the Upper Class)—Yat being slang for a respectable and distinguished Jew. He was first a driver of a truck, later the owner of several trucks, and finally appears as a merchant who imports goods from the city into the town. For years he had spent his leisure hours in the company of drivers and stable boys, and flirted with maid servants, but gradually a desire arises within him to rise above his environment. A *Shadkan* helps him to bridge the gulf and through various manipulations Mates is married to the daughter of a member of the upper class, a merchant who is in need of Mates' money. This alliance has a marked influence upon the ex-driver. He is charmed by the manners, looks and demeanor of his wife who is a marked contrast to the objects of his former flirtations. He tries to raise himself, to put on some veneer of external respectability, and thus a gulf is created between him and his employees, his former boon companions. At times he tries to join them in their amusements on Sabbath afternoons, but he fails for they feel that he now belongs to another world.

Other stories deal with episodes in the lives of young Jews who have entirely broken away from Jewish life in quest of the pleasures of the world which are more important to them than their Jewishness. They are strong-armed men, assimilated to their environment, in whose hearts fear no longer reigns and to whom the sight of blood brings no terror. At times, under the influence of Gorki and his school, Ash attempts to delve into the soul of the outcasts of society, to discover there the essentially human, and in one of his stories he depicts masterfully how the cry of an infant arouses the human emotions in the hardened heart of a thief used to many kinds of crimes. He struggles to overcome these emotions and makes several attempts to leave the child in the street but the cry calls him back. He obeys the essentially human voice in his heart. These various delineations of the life of the town in its local colors and its various phases, the brighter and the darker, constitute the first phase or stage of Ash's literary expression.

Ash, who is of an impressible nature and whose creative genius is

constantly in search of new fields of activity, could not remain indifferent to an important change which was taking place in the life of the dwellers of the town, namely their emigration to America. Emigration was nothing new in the life of Russian Jewry. It began, as we know, in the early eighties but it reached its peak in the first decade of the present century. Our writer, therefore, turned his attention to this side of Jewish life and in a number of works he follows the town dwellers to the new country and pictures their life and struggles in the new environment.

Such an attempt to depict the town on the move and follow its dwellers to the new country was made, as we have seen, by Shalom Aleikem, but the humorist emphasized the incongruities in the life of these settlers, while Ash, whose eye is more attuned to the tragic strain in Jewish life, saw the inner struggle in the souls of the people and their desperate efforts to retain the integrity of their former mode of life in the face of adverse conditions and he saw too their ultimate failure.

Kein America (To America) is the first of this group of works. In this tale, which describes the migration of a family of town dwellers to America and their efforts to reorientate themselves, the principal character is a child, Yosele by name. In contradistinction to his brothers who are more interested in play than in study, Yosele is a student by nature and he slowly absorbs the learning of the ages, and becomes rooted in the life of the town and saturated with its spirit. Consequently, he more than his brothers is loathe to part with it when the family leaves for America. Fate wills that he be refused admission to this country and he returns once more to the beloved town, and for a few years more absorbs its spirit and learning. When he ultimately rejoins his parents in the new world, he cannot adjust himself to the environment. He finds himself in a strange world wherever he moves, in school, in the street, and even at home. The spell of the old life is too strong to be shaken off lightly and the weak child succumbs under the strain of longing and the feeling of strangeness. There is undoubtedly exaggeration in the tragic end of Yosele but it nevertheless is symbolic of the deep suffering of many a Jewish immigrant during the first years of his adjustment. Typical and characteristic are the closing words of the novel. "To her (Yosele's mother) it seemed, on returning from the funeral, that she must remain for the rest of her life on the new soil for she is bound to it by a grave." It was the bond

of death which joined many an immigrant to the new life and the new world. As usual with Ash, there is much description of collective group life both in the old and the new world.

In *Uncle Moses*, a novel which appeared a number of years later, light is thrown upon the problem of adjustment of the first generation of Jewish immigrants from another angle. The town people first attempted to maintain a certain semblance of the old life in the new environment by grouping together and surrounding themselves with an atmosphere which had some of the qualities of the old home. Moses Melnik, one of the earlier immigrants, a man of strong character, succeeds in adjusting himself economically; he opens a clothing factory and employs his townspeople. He gradually surrounds himself with a whole colony of *Landsleute* (Townspeople). They work in his factory, live in his tenement houses, and when they organize a society he becomes their president. In short, he is their benefactor, ruler, and guide. For a time the relation between Moses and the colony continues to be that of the head of a family to the family as a whole. But the crisis ultimately comes. There arises a new spirit; the effect of the environment slowly undermines the paternal despotism of Moses. A strike led by a son of an immigrant who grows up in the new land and turns socialist breaks out in Moses' factory, and suddenly the whole power of the despot is gone. Even his young wife, who married him because of the poverty of her parents, turns against him and the mighty boss and president finds himself as helpless as many of his protégées. However, the tragedy of Moses' failure, though apparently the center of the novel, is in reality not the main point of interest. This lies primarily in the remarkable scenes and descriptions of episodes of group life. In this work especially there is a wealth of such description and the panorama of Jewish life in the new world is kaleidoscopic.

In *Die Mutter* (The Mother), which can be considered the third work of this group, the author did not aim so much at depicting the life of the Jewish immigrant in the New World as in projecting some of the fundamental characteristics of the Jewish soul, and chief among them the elemental and all-embracing love of the Jewish woman. The self-sacrifice of the Jewish mother, her deep family love which has little parallel in the life of other peoples attracted the attention of many writers and poets, but few have dealt with the subject as skilfully, as artistically, and as affectionately as Ash. In fact, the Jewish mother is

a favorite character with him and she often appears in his novels, but in this work alone is she allotted the central role.

In this novel, Ash draws the portrait of the Jewish mother in her old as well as in her modern form. He employs the method which he frequently uses for the projection of his character, namely the story of a family. He begins the story with the life of the family in the old town and then transfers the scene and the family to America. The canvas is, therefore, large and wide and the author is able to draw numerous pictures on it, but the central ones are Sarah Rivka Zlotnick and her daughter Deborah. In the first part, devoted to the town, Sarah Rivka, the mother of a large and poor family struggles with poverty, disease, and troubles from her children, and displays rare ingenuity in finding food for the family. She bears all suffering in silence and seldom rebels against her husband, Anshel, who contributes nothing to the household but is proud of his ability as a reader of the Torah in the synagogue of the town. Sarah Rivka glories in the social distinction. Her assistant in the motherly role is Deborah who from her youth bears a part of the burden of the house and shares her mother's worries. Deborah grows up in an atmosphere of idealism, and here Ash idealizes the spread of socialism among the youth of the town. It is not a means for increase of material comfort, but in the eyes of Henech, a Hassidic youth, who introduces Deborah to the cause it is an ideal aiming to free suffering humanity, or as he calls it, *Die Heilige Zach* (The Holy Thing). The holy cause overshadows even the incipient love between the two. Thus, saturated with love and naïve idealism mother and daughter depart with the family for America.

It is a new country, new conditions, but the tribulations of the mother are both old and new. As of old she has to use all her ingenuity to feed the family. Anshel overlooks his pride and works in a shop but the wages are not sufficient. Rent days and the holidays are still ominous signs in her life, and when the material worries slacken, suffering of a new type appears. Deborah breaks with the old life and goes to live with a poor painter whom she hopes to inspire to great creations. Sarah Rivka, torn between mother love and her religion, cannot survive the stress and dies. The role of mother is transferred to Deborah who plays it in her own way. She is both wife and mother to her painter, and when ultimately he attains fame and falls in love with another woman, she leaves him, in spite of his protests, so that he

may be happy with his beloved. She remains throughout the self-sacrificing Jewish mother.

Artistic as is the delineation of the types of the Jewish mother, both the old and the new, there is equal art and skill in the general portrayal of Jewish life both in the old world and the new. There are numerous episodes in the life of the other members of the family who come in for their share of delineation, which are described with keen understanding. Above all, there is an air of sympathy on the part of the author with his characters in their struggles and tribulations, their failures and achievements, which adds a special quality to the work. The dwellers of the town in the new world and in a new environment form then the themes of the second phase of Ash's literary expression.

Ash did not remain with his characters in the new world to follow their further progress of adjustment but returned instead to the old European scene. Great things were happening there. The spirit of revolution was stalking about in Russia. It also entered the town, but above all it dominated the city. Jewish life in the city, both in the upper and lower circles, had attracted the writer even previously. Between novels devoted to the portrayal of the dynamic and static life of the town, he penned works with themes drawn from city life. Influenced as he was by the Gorki school in his younger days, he attempted to picture the Jewish underworld and gave us first his *Gott fun Nekamah* (God of Revenge) and later his *Motke Ganev* (Motke the Thief). In the former, we have the tragedy of Yankel Shabshewich, owner of a house of ill-repute, who endeavors to guard the purity of his own daughter but fails. The moral apparently is that one cannot combat the influence of environment, a commonplace thought, but the emphasis is laid rather on the tragic aspect of Yankel's life, his awakened consciousness of sin and his remorse, and this is presented with skill.

In the second novel, the story of the life of a notorious character of the Warsaw underworld is told from his birth and childhood in the town to the end of his career in the city. An attempt is made by the author to blame society for Motke's criminal career but he fails. Motke arouses no pity in us. With the exception of his tragic love for the pure and respectable Hannele, the daughter of the owner of a restaurant, which brings about his downfall, no phase of his life arouses our sympathy. The polar love, that is the love of the men of the lower stratum for the daughters of the upper circle is a frequent motive with

Ash. We have already noted it in *Mates*, the character of the *Yatische Tochter*.

Despite all the realism which Ash injects into his picture, he is not at his best in portraying the underworld. His talent is displayed to greater advantage in depicting the general Jewish life of the city, and to a certain degree, the non-Jewish, with its constant hum of activity, flux of events, and great movements which sweep masses of people. It is displayed in his novel, *The Three Cities*, and in a smaller degree in an earlier novel, *Mary*. In fact, *Mary*, though written twenty years earlier, can be considered a preliminary work to the later novel, for though a large part of the story takes place in an Ukrainian town, it is no longer the old town but a city in miniature. The theme of both these works is the changed Jewish life in the decade preceding the Russian Revolution as well as the Revolution itself. Neither is a novel in the real sense of the word, though the author makes strenuous efforts to analyze the personalities of the characters psychologically and succeeds in part. The interest, though, shifts to the general problems of life and to the cinematic presentation of events. As a result, neither novel has a principal character. Though the earlier work is named *Mary*, the girl by that name is not the main character. She is only one of several types of the new generation of Jewish youth who, torn away from old life and tradition, wander in the world in search of a way of life and an ideal. She represents the wandering spirit of Jewish youth in the extreme, and the epithet "gypsy child" given to her by the author through one of his characters suits her well. Mischa, her cousin, who wavers between Zionism and socialism, is another wanderer who is as important a character as Mary. His final act, insisting on marrying Rachel, the daughter of the physician Leiserowich after she had been outraged in a pogrom is symbolic of the new spirit of a part of Jewish youth who return to their people as a result of their suffering. Other wanderers are the lesser characters, Maksimowich, the art critic, and Feodor, the editorial writer, both assimilated Jews who are skilfully drawn in their Petersburg environment. Thus in *Mary* we have a cross-section of Jewish life and its movements at the end of the first decade of the present century and a miniature of the larger and many-colored panorama drawn in *Three Cities*.

In this work which consists of three parts, one entitled *Petersburg*, the second, *Warsaw*, and the third, *Moscow*, Ash draws his pictures of Jewish life in the decade between 1910 and 1920 on a large scale. He

distinguishes in it three phases: the life of the Jews of the upper classes, the assimilated, before the War; that of the masses in the Pale of Settlement whose soul had awakened to their miserable situation and found expression in the enthusiasm of the young generation for the ideals of the Revolution and a change in the social order; and that of the Revolution itself in the process of its becoming during the years when it was taking shape. To each of these phases, a part of the work is respectively devoted.

As in many of his other works, Ash attempts to convey the great variety of events and episodes, which he unrolls before the readers, through the life-stories of his characters, especially his main character, but as is frequently the case in his novels, there is really no main character. The author tries hard to make young Mirkin, the son of a Russian Jewish millionaire, an impressionable young man of weak personality and morbid tendencies, the principal character of the long complicated novel. He carries him through the many vicissitudes of the book and even goes into a psychoanalytical discussion tracing the origin of his mother complex, but on the whole, he is not successful. Young Mirkin's life is more a means of centralizing the events than an end in itself. His father, Gabriel Mirkin, and the Warsaw woman, Rachel Leah Hurwitz, can equally be considered main characters. In fact, each of the two represents a certain phase of the Jewish character, the former the Jewish steadfastness in the pursuit of an aim, even if that be the accumulation of riches, and the ability to submit to fate not only with resignation but with a certain dignity, and the latter, the all-expressive love of the Jewish mother, a favorite type with Ash.

His tendency to idealize Jewish life and to point out the characteristics which enabled the Jew to survive in spite of all the persecutions and suffering is in great evidence in this book. With all his disparagement of the circle of the assimilated Russian Jews of which the older Mirkin is a leading member, his portrait of him possesses much attraction. In spite of his irresistible desire for climbing to heights of material wealth and social position, his love for display of his riches and his estrangement from his people, he impresses us by his strength and integrity of character and by his calmness under misfortune. His love for Russia which is genuine is not diminished even by the transpiring events of the Revolution, and when the new régime of the Soviet robs him of his entire fortune that he had amassed during a life time, he re-

jects all proposals for escape and places himself at the service of the new masters for the benefit of the country.

Rachel Leah Hurwitz, the wife of a poor enlightened Jew who still lives in the ideals of the Haskalah and devotes himself to the spread of secular knowledge among the *Yeshibah* students of Poland, whose home is the refuge of the needy in spite of poverty, and who sympathizes with the socialistic movement, typifies in her activities expanded mother love. The activities of the other mothers in Ash's works were limited to the family, or in the case of Deborah in the novel, *The Mother*, to a single person, but Rachel Leah embraces in her love not only the needy of the entire neighborhood but all suffering humanity. Hence this plain, uneducated woman is in deep sympathy with the socialistic ideal.

Ash believes that the sympathy of the Jews in Russia for socialism and the revolution did not emanate from the fact that they were the greatest sufferers from the old régime, but to a large extent, from their innate idealism. He further believes that this idealism is inherent in the very web of Judaism and he, therefore, makes an old type Jew, saturated with the spirit of Hassidism, the mouthpiece of its expression. Baruch Chomsky, the elder of a Jewish community, expounds to a perplexed wanderer in life, young Zachary Mirkin, his views of life and the world. He teaches him that the entire world is a living organism affected by the ideas and the movements of each of the individuals in it. The purpose of the life of man is, therefore, to feel the pulse of the world at large in its march to perfection. This thought and similar ones which have their roots in certain Hassidic writings are emphasized by Ash again and again and are always tinged with the spirit of an optimistic belief in man. A typical example of Jewish idealism is the episode in which he describes Solomon Hurwitz, the husband of Rachel Leah, the old *Maskil* who, though steeped in the ideals of liberalism and Polish patriotism, sells his books, his only cherished property, in order to give some money to his friend Kenigstein, the Zionist, for his trip to Palestine.

Hurwitz opposes Zionism, but seeing the suffering of his friend who longs to go to Palestine but is unable to satisfy that desire on account of lack of funds, he decides to make the great sacrifice. He says, "It is not my ideal, but it is an ideal nevertheless, and it is worth sacrificing for."

The description of the Russian Revolution which is done with nu-

merous details is, on the whole, skilful and displays keen insight into its essence. It is an attempt to portray the inner spirit which animated it. Ash is not in sympathy with the Revolution and sees its grave defects, the selfishness of some of the leaders, the dangers of mob rule, the chaos which ensued from it; yet he is able to catch the intense enthusiasm of the masses which reaches the stage of frenzy as well as the religious ecstasy which animates the leaders at certain moments and to portray these aspects remarkably well. He even tries to explain the changed psychology of some of the "comrades," among them Jews and Jewesses, who turned from good-natured idealists into stern leaders, frequently displaying cold-blooded cruelty to the representatives of the capitalist class. The last part, *Moscow*, displays Ash's powers of observation and portrayal of group life and mass movements at their best. The book, as a whole, in spite of its many artistic defects, contradictions, and unnecessary and loosely coherent episodes, presents an extensive panorama of life in an eventful decade of Jewish history, and also throws light upon the stirring events of the general world.

Ash, whose creative spirit was in constant search of new forms of expression, was not satisfied with themes drawn from contemporary life from the near past, but also delved from time to time into the rich history of the Jews. In his preface to the *Kishuf Macherin fun Kastilien* (The Witch of Castile), he tells us that two moments in Jewish history always attracted him, martyrdom and the Messianic movement. He accordingly wrote two novels dealing with martyrdom and a drama entitled *Shabbatai Zevi* in which the famous false Messiah is the principal character. He also wrote another drama, *Die Marranen* (The Marranos) which was intended to depict the settlement of the Jews in Holland. Both of these dramas, however, are fragmentary and by no means carry out the purpose the author had in mind though the one on Sabbatai Zebi is the more developed of the two. An attempt is made by the writer to unravel the psychological puzzle which the personality of the false Messiah presents. He began his life as an ascetic, as a man devoted to the law, and ended as a libertine, pleasure-loving man, preaching the abrogation of many laws and moral laxity. Ash attributes the change entirely to the influence of Sarah, the adventurous Ukrainian girl, who became the wife of Sabbatai. It is she, according to Ash, who preaches the new philosophy of liberation from law. The Messiah at first struggles against the influence of the woman, but finally succumbs. Neither the struggle in Sabbatai's soul nor the

personality of Sarah who plays as important a role in the drama as Sabbatai are sufficiently illuminated, and in general, there is more talk than action. Still there are several fine scenes masterfully depicted.

The novels, *Die Kishuf Macherin fun Kastilien* and *Kiddush ha-Shem* (Sanctification of the name of God) are much better executed. The former has for its theme the burning of a Jewish girl in Rome by the Inquisition during the reign of Pope Paul IV who was distinguished for his persecution of the Jews. It has, as the author himself states, little of the historical, except for one episode, the flooding of the ghetto by the Tiber which occurred in the year 1550 and which caused the death of a number of Jews. All the other events are the creation of the productive imagination of the author. The main character is Yafta, a Jewish girl from Spain, whose face is Madonna-like and a Venetian painter who having seen her by chance and fallen in love with her, paints a Madonna in her likeness in one of the leading churches. The most striking resemblance between the living maiden and the painting causes a stir in Rome as the populace believes her the incarnation of the Holy Mother. The Pope who thinks her a witch decides to apply the test of fire to determine whether the curious resemblance is witchcraft or incarnation, and Yafta dies the death of a martyr. The emphasis is laid primarily on the portrayal of the environment, the events and the general atmosphere of the Middle Ages. In fact, the author himself calls it an historical picture, and as such it is well drawn.

Kiddush ha-Shem has for its theme the massacre of the Jews during the Cossack revolt under Chmelnicki in the years 1648-1649. In this work Ash attains great heights of artistic creativeness. The content is entirely historical for the author utilized the Chronicles of the time and followed them very closely. Even the final episode, the martyrdom of the Jewish woman, Deborah, who tells her Cossack captor that she is bullet-proof and persuades him to shoot her is recorded in the Chronicles. Ash added nothing to the plot, but he did recreate the great historical episode, animate it with a spirit of life, and supply meaning to a very significant epoch in Jewish history.

The novel is divided into two parts. In the first part, the life of the Jews in the Ukraine of the period is portrayed. The portrayal is masterful. We see before us Mendel the inn-keeper, who lives in a village in the wide steppes among the Ukrainian serfs, struggling to maintain his Jewishness in the strange environment. For the sake of his religion,

he suffers all humiliations at the hands of the Polish nobleman, the owner of the village. He dances before his drunken comrades and even dons a bearskin in order to amuse them, but as compensation he obtains permission to build a synagogue. Thenceforth Jewish life begins to develop. Gradually other Jews settle in the town and a new community is created—Slatchow. Mendel's son, Shlomeh, obtains instruction from the Rabbi of the town, and is ultimately engaged to his daughter, and Mendel becomes a leader of the community. The story of Mendel and his family is intertwined with numerous other pictures of Jewish life in the Ukraine, communal meetings, the position of the scholar in Jewish society and his influence on life. In all these not only does the author recreate a realistic picture of the Jewish life of the past, but attempts to solve the secret of Jewish survival by delineating the ability of the Jews to adapt themselves to circumstances, to brave danger and all hazards for the sake of their religion and inner life, and still more, their ability to rise above their environment. Living as they did in the midst of a half wild population of serfs, ruled by dissolute Polish nobles and threatened by the danger of the revolt of the wild Cossacks of the Saproze Island in the Dnieper, they were yet able to maintain the integrity of spirit, nobility of soul, and devotion to Torah and God.

The second part opens with a description of the rumble of the oncoming storm. Fearful rumors are spread among the Jews of the Ukraine of the brewing revolt among the Cossacks, and simultaneously whispers are heard about the approach of the Messiah. Soon the storm breaks out in full force. Community after community flies to fortified cities, among them also the community of Slatchow. Mendel at first refuses to leave the town which he had built with so much labor, but finally yields to the entreaties of the Rabbi. Then follows a series of wholesale acts of martyrdoms. In a number of places the Jews attempt to oppose the Cossacks by force but they are betrayed and overpowered. Martyrdom is the only way to eternal life. In the portrayal of these scenes Ash displays the full power of poetic talent. The pathos, the tragedy, the holiness of spirit are all brought out with a lyrical force. Through all the tragic occurrences, there shines forth the beautiful picture of Deborah, the wife of Shlomeh. The author lavishes upon her all physical and spiritual charm. She impresses even the blood-thirsty Cossack, her captor, with her spirituality, and it is her heavenly beauty rather than her physical charms that enchants him, so that he actually

believes that she is protected by the spirit from death and thus she wins her martyrdom.

Through all these scenes there flits a semi-mystical figure, a learned tailor who also serves as teacher in Mendel's community, and later appears on various occasions. He often warns the Jews who want to fight with the words, "Reserve your strength for the sake of God," meaning thereby that their full strength is necessary for martyrdom. He serves the author as a symbol of Jewish survival under all circumstances. And when the storm blows over, and the remnants of Ukrainian Jewry meet at the great fair in Lublin, Poland, the tailor is discovered sitting in an empty store. When Shlomeh, the only survivor of the Mendel family, who was sold as a slave in Turkey and later redeemed, asks him what he is selling, he answers, "I sell trust in God and hope," the two angels which accompanied the Jews in exile. Thus in this novel, Ash not only recreates a historical period but also attempts to catch the flutterings of the soul of the nation in great moments in history.

Allied in spirit with the *Kiddush ha-Shem* though not in content is the later work, *Der Thillim Yid* (Known in the English translation as *Salvation*, a rather inadequate title). It is neither a novel in the proper sense of the word nor an historical tale. It approaches more the character of a poem of the inner life of the Jews in Poland three quarters of a century ago. As in the above-mentioned historical works, the purpose of the author was to lay bare the religious aspect of the Jewish soul to its innermost depth, that element which alone made Jewish life tolerable under the gravest circumstances. He chose the exposition of the essence of Ḥassidism as his theme. Ḥassidism undoubtedly contains much light (Vol. III, Sec. 10) and its rays have long illuminated the gloom of the ghetto, though in daily life it is and was often covered by shadows. Ash, however, ignored its shortcomings and devoted himself to presenting it in glowing colors. He selected the finest and most elevated sayings of numerous *Zaddikim*, the most exalted legends, and enriched them with poetic beauty and from the combination of these elements he created the main character of the work, Yehiel, the *Thillim Yid*.

Unlike his other works, this one is centralized around his principal character. There are, of course, descriptions of Jewish life in the town and scenes from "courts" of other *Zaddikim* which serve as a background for the personality of Yehiel, but his life and the unfolding of his soul in its various stages until it reaches the highest rung of spiritu-

ality constitute the larger part of the content. He is revealed to us as a child of poor parents, whose stay in life is piety and whose hope is learning. Yeḥiel is queer; he does not want to delve in the "Sea of the Talmud," and his heart expands at the expense of his mind. Not the scholars attract him, but the poor, the meek, the uneducated. Human suffering becomes his own suffering. He searches for God not through contemplation but through love. Love for the Jewish people and for all sufferers becomes his great passion, and the Book of Psalms, the book of the poor and the lowly, becomes his comfort and his source of strength. Long and painful is his path to holiness; many are the thorns which lacerate his soul on that way and great are the tragedies he endures, but he emerges from all more purified and more ennobled. Against his will he becomes a *Zaddik*, not the saint of the rich and powerful, the learned and the leaders, but of the poor, sick, and suffering. They need him and he is with them. To all pleas for help he prescribes chapters of *Thillim* which he himself recites with the suppliant. The last rung in the ladder of the ascension of the spirit is reached through a crisis in his soul brought about by the following episode. Early in his career as *Zaddik*, he was forced to promise one of his followers that his wife would bear a child. The child, a girl, grew up. Her parents, in the manner of the time, are about to marry her off to a scholarly and Hassidic young man. She, however, has fallen in love with a Gentile, and on her wedding day, flies to the house of her lover and is taken into a monastery preparatory to conversion. The father, desperate, turns to the *Zaddik* for help. In vain does he pray and recite the Psalms; she does not return. The father, though a man of the people and uneducated, is deeply pious and asks the *Zaddik* for her death. The miracle happens and the girl dies in the Church before conversion. The father is relieved but the *Zaddik* is not. He is disturbed to the depths of his soul because he believes he sent a Jewish person to death. He imagines he is punished for his sin, for the reward in the world to come is taken away from him. He is content to worship God without reward, but he is assailed by doubt. The old problem why does the good God allow so much suffering in the world and especially to His chosen people weighs heavily upon his mind. His soul is filled with gloom, but he emerges from it on the discovery that suffering is only a means of ennobling the soul—and Jewish suffering a means of salvation—and peace enters his soul once more as he dies the death of the just.

Yehiel is, of course, a composite picture of the finest Hassidic types rather than an individual, but nevertheless his story reveals the religiosity of the Jew in its purest and finest form and helps us to understand his role during the ages.

69. YOUNGER WRITERS

The decade preceding the World War was a very fruitful period for Yiddish belles-lettres. Many younger novelists and short story writers made their debut during that time. Some soon exhausted their talents in a novel or two or in a few stories, but a number continued to produce and develop during the following years and made important contributions to that branch of Yiddish literature. The most distinguished of the younger group of writers are David Bergelson (b.1883) and M. Weissenberg (1881-1937).

The former is a very prolific writer. During the twenty odd years of his literary productivity he has written several novels and a large number of short stories and novelettes. In general, though, there are to be noted two distinct phases in his work, that of the pre-Revolution and of the post-Revolution. In the former, the themes are taken from Jewish life in the town in the period of disintegration, while in the latter he portrays episodes and moments of a hectic and stormy life of post-Revolutionary days. Still later, when he became an ardent follower of the Soviet régime, he, like many other Yiddish writers in Russia, idealized this new life.

Like most of the writers of his generation, he is a realist and his purpose is to portray the sections of the life he sees. The town life that he pictures is that of a disintegrating community. There is little of the old traditional type left, and what still exists is in a state of decline. His characters are mainly members of the younger generation who have returned to the town from the city and are attempting to continue their former way of life in a cramped environment. With the exception of several characters in his novel, *Noch Alemen* (All is Gone), all of them are weak personalities, wanderers in life, who are dissatisfied with their environment and are always longing for something without having a clear conception of what they really want.

This type of person represented, on the whole, a large part of the younger generation of Russian Jewry and was especially numerous among the Intelligentsia, the children of the middle class Jews. In order to depict this phase of Jewish life which he knew best the writer

employs groups of characters. He is neither entirely individualistic as was Perez, nor collectivistic as is Ash, but follows a middle way instead. He seldom concentrates on one character alone, but usually deals with a group of them. This is especially true of his short stories and novellettes of the pre-War stage. In this manner we obtain many glimpses of the life of the time for each character reflects a small section of it, but at the same time their individual personalities are not lost. The writer manages to deal with them, in some measure, as individuals, nor does he entirely neglect the representatives of the older type of Jewish life for a number of his characters belong to the class of Jewish patricians, but they are represented in tragic circumstances as men who have lost their fortunes and who are strangers in the new world which surrounds them.

Of greater value are his post-Revolutionary works, especially those written in the early days of the Soviet régime when the new order was still struggling for existence, such as *Sturmteg* (Stormy Days) and *Midat ha-Din* (Stern Justice). In the former, sketches of Jewish life in the Ukraine during the first years after the War are given. Some portray the chaos which reigned at the time in that country when various bands of anti-revolutionists swept through the country like hurricanes leaving destruction in their wake. Others masterfully describe the adjustment of the Jews to the chaotic conditions, their efforts to avoid danger, their constant fear of the bands, and their will to live which expressed itself in numerous ways. Still other stories delineate the effects of the Soviet régime in its early years upon the middle class Jews, the confusion of the older people, and the adjustment of the younger to the new circumstances.

Midat ha-Din is a longer story of the life during the same years, but the scene is laid in a frontier town where the struggle is still going on between the forces of the Soviet and remnants of counter-revolutionary bands aided by groups of socialist opponents of the Bolsheviks. The Jews of the town carry on a brisk trade in smuggling goods and immigrants across the border, but they are soon stopped by the Soviet forces. The work is more a description than a story, for it pictures the happenings in the frontier town in the days of upheaval. The hopes entertained by many that the change is after all only temporary and that the old order will soon come back, the confusion in the manner of life, the curtailment of the smuggling activity by the young commandant of the border post—all these are depicted with great skill. Both works possess

human interest and the writer affords us glimpses into a life which was in the process of adjustment to entirely new conditions hitherto unheard of.

Weissenberg distinguished himself primarily as a writer of short stories of Polish Jewish life during the last few decades. The characters are as a rule physically strong Jews, hard-working men, whose goal in life is material welfare, but there are also others whose attitude to life is more noble and whose view of it is more intellectual. The author's quality is his plasticism. His characters are portrayed in detail but it is a detail which extends to the inner life as well as to external appearances and actions. He also possesses, like Perez, the ability to emphasize a single trait and thereby illuminate the whole personality of his characters. An important place in his stories is given to the inner struggle of his characters against sin. They are attracted to it, but at the same time are restrained by the tradition of ages, by inhibitions from which they have not yet emancipated themselves. They succumb to the lure but as a rule pay dearly for it. This struggle with its resultant consequences, especially in the lives of the women, is depicted in an objective manner by Weissenberg.

Besides these two, many others worked in the field of Yiddish belles-lettres, among them Ozer Warshawski, Zebi Hirschkan, Joel Mastbaum, A. Zeitlin, Nistor, and H. Tchemerinski. Each of them contributed his share to the manifold of Yiddish fiction. Warshawski drew realistic portraits of the rougher life of the Jews, during and immediately after the War, in which strong-fisted, pleasure-loving characters, divested of Jewish tradition, predominate. Nistor introduced the mystic note, and Tchemerinski gave an idyllic picture of life in a Lithuanian town in its static phase.

CHAPTER VII

POETRY, ESSAYS, AND CRITICISM

70. *HISTORICAL SURVEY*

Yiddish poetry has a longer history than Yiddish fiction, for while the latter is almost entirely a product of the last seventy-five years and its beginnings can be definitely traced, as we have seen, to the middle of the nineteenth century, the roots of the former extend much farther back in time. The tales and stories of the Judaeo-German literature were, as noted in a preceding volume (Vol. II, Sec. 165), mostly translations or adaptations from other languages, and there was little attempt at originality. Such was not the case, however, with poetry. Judaeo-German or Yiddish being a spoken language and not, as the Hebrew, a literary medium only, it was inevitable that the creative spirit of the large masses should endeavor to find some form of expression for its emotions and sentiments. And as usual, this expression took the form of poetry, for in all literatures poetry precedes prose. The brevity of the poem, the rhythm, the rhyme, and above all the melody within which it is sung or recited, contribute to its popularity and spread it among the masses orally long before it is put down in writing. Quite often these early poetic productions are anonymous, for they grow out of the creative impulse of the people in response to sudden emotions, but as literature begins to develop, authorship becomes more and more fixed. Accordingly, we have a considerable number of poems and songs in Judaeo-German by poets whose names are known, which were produced during the latter part of the Middle Ages and which were surveyed by us in the proper place (Vol. II, Sec. 166).

The same phenomenon is encountered in modern Yiddish literature. Long before poems by known bards began to be written, there circulated among the Jews of Eastern Europe a considerable number of songs of anonymous origin which were sung by the people on various occasions. These were mostly produced during the first six decades of the nineteenth century, as the themes and motives reflect the life of

those days, but some of them originated even earlier, probably during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

It was the spirit of these folk songs which impressed itself upon a large part of Yiddish poetry produced during the nineteenth century. For a long time the poets of the Haskalah period continued to sing in a manner which was more suited to the taste of the masses and were intended to arouse the emotions and sentiments of the collective group rather than to satisfy the yearnings of the few, the more cultured, and the more literarily trained, for deeper expression and poetic presentation of life and the world. The bards of the period even more than the writers of fiction always had in mind the tastes and the likes of their readers or their auditors and attuned their songs to their cultural level. As a result, even the best of Yiddish poetry during a large part of the period always retained the folk character. It possessed the charm peculiar to such types of poetry and the strength of feeling which appeals to large masses, but it seldom rose to heights of inspiration or expresses the depths of the human soul. In fact, not until recently when a younger generation of poets arose did Yiddish poetry liberate itself from the folk spirit impressed upon it from its early days. The greater part of it, with few exceptions, expresses the collective attitude toward life. The individual feeling of the poet in regard to life and nature, their beauties, changes, and metamorphoses are hardly touched upon. Yiddish poetry, at least during the nineteenth century and even until a decade later, was not only a ghetto product but to a large degree also a class poetry. This was due not only to the fact that the knowledge and use of Yiddish were limited merely to the East-European Jews while Hebrew was understood and read by large numbers among the other Jewries, but also to the fact that the literature of that language ministered during the greater part of the period of its development to one stratum in Jewry and not to the people as a whole. Even the writers and singers for a long time did not consider Yiddish a national language, and a number even looked upon their poetic productions as an act of condescension on their part. Again, during the two decades before the World War when class consciousness was aroused in Jewry as among other nations, and the working class, in a way, appropriated Yiddish as its particular language, poetry more than fiction became a medium of expression of the sentiments, views, and even of the grievances of that class. It was only later when large groups of Jews sought to declare Yiddish a Jewish national language, or as the extrem-

ists aver, *the* national language, that Yiddish poetry transcended its bounds and began to ascend to greater heights.

As a result of the conditions and limitations of its birth and production, Yiddish poetry until very recent times lacked both universalistic and individualistic strains, nor did it express the spirit of the nation as a whole to a large extent. With few exceptions, it paid little attention to the beauties and grandeur of nature, nor did the singers express either the Jewish tragedy in its full depth or sing songs of hope. Even the battle-cry of the Haskalah which found such powerful expression in the Hebrew poems of a Judah Leib Gordon and several of his followers, hardly found an echo in Yiddish poetry. We thus observe the curious phenomenon that, while modern Yiddish fiction can, on the whole, compare favorably with that of the Hebrew, the poetry of the former falls much below the standard of the latter. Yet, within its sphere, Yiddish poetry forms an important element in the culture of the Jewish people, and as such, we will briefly survey it.

71. FOLK SONGS

The number of anonymous folk songs is considerably large. The first collection made of such poems by S. Ginsburg and F. S. Marek and published in 1901 contains three hundred and seventy-six numbers. Subsequent collections by Noah Prilutzki and others added many more. Their character varies. The earlier ones, dating probably from the early years of the nineteenth century or even still earlier, are primarily of a religious nature. Of these, some, such as those which were recited by the women at the departure of the Sabbath are permeated with a spirit of piety. Others, while still religious, are in a lighter vein. To these belong especially songs in which the glories of Messianic times are portrayed. Several of them were very popular and were put to music and sung at gatherings and in fact are still sung. There are also a number of Hassidic songs in which the saintliness of the *Zaddikim* and the devotion of their followers are glorified. The numerous cradle songs may also be included among the semi-religious poems. Most of these are devoted to the boy who was repeatedly lulled to sleep to the tune of hope and the portrayal of his future scholarly role. The study of the Torah is the principal motive of most of these lullabies. Several, though, are of a secular nature and consist of a jingle of rhymes about various things. The girl occupies a minor role in the cradle-songs as the study of the Torah was not her share. Still she is not forgotten

entirely and several variants of standard lullabies promise her a student of the Torah as a groom.

The role of the girl looms large in the considerable group of songs which centers around love, marriage, and married life. The love songs undoubtedly date from a later period when the new spirit of the times had forced its way through the walls of the ghetto. In most of them the woman is the singer and the frequent motives are disappointment in love and complaints at the falsehood of the lovers. Several, though, express the devotion of the beloved to her lover and her readiness to follow him to the end of the world or to wait for his return when separation is forced, as by military service. In a number, though, the man sings of his love for the woman portraying her beauty and charm, or complaining of her perfidy. These songs were sung especially by the young men and women of the working-class accompanying their work.

In the songs centering about marriage and family life, the woman again plays the principal role. In many of them the erstwhile bride bewails her fate when she realizes the character of her husband or the wife portrays the bitter lot of her marital life, in which she has to endure poverty and above all the indifference of the husband. A number have as their motive the malice of the proverbial mother-in-law. In a number of songs the young husband expresses his disappointment with the marriage, but on the whole, there is a materialistic note in his disillusionment. Either he emphasizes the wife's spendthriftiness or inability to cook, or more frequently the deception practiced upon him by the father-in-law who did not pay the promised dowry.

There is a large group of folk songs which reflect the hard life of the Jews in Russia and their oppression by the government during the reign of Nicholas I. The leading motive is the terror of the parents at the thought that their young children will be forcibly dragged away to long military service by special men employed by the Jewish community as recruiting officers. In these songs the plight of the young children and their sad fate is told and the wrath against the communal leaders and their injustice in seizing mainly the children of the poor is strongly expressed.*

Finally there is a large number of folk songs of a nondescript character. Some express devotion to religion and tradition; others bewail suffering and tribulation; and still others tell of the economic plight of various classes of Jews. With few exceptions the greater part of these

* For more detailed data on this matter, see Vol. III, p. 279, note.

songs hardly rises to poetic heights, but all of them are saturated with the folk spirit and reflect the attitude of the people to life and its hardships.

72. *FOLK BARDS (BARDS OF THE HASKALAH PERIOD)*

As indicated above, the folk spirit which animated the unknown singers of the anonymous songs also permeated the poems of the numerous bards who wrote during the span of time extending from the middle of the last century to its last decade. The line of these poets is very long, for almost every Yiddish writer in those days thought it his duty to pen a few poems; yet only a few display real talent and deep emotion. The great majority of them were mere versifiers. Still a number attuned their poems to the spirit and feeling of the masses and their songs became popular and were set to music and sung at gatherings and festive occasions.

The motives of these numerous poems were various. A number of earlier poets drew upon religious life, glorifying the Sabbath and the festivals, or contemplated the rationality displayed in the world. This group included Isaac Meir Dick (Sec. 62), A. B. Gottlober, Eliezer Zweifel, and several more. Others, and these constituted a considerable group, wrote didactic poetry, mainly employing the Haskalah motive, and calling upon their brethren to change their ways of life. Later, the nationalistic motive became prevalent and the call for a return to Zion was distinctly heard; and still later the plight of the working class began to be expressed. Still others employed motives taken from daily life and sang of its most glorious features. In all this mass of poetic productions there is, as noted, little of the individualistic note, few nature poems, and still fewer love poems, and primarily an emphasis on the group spirit.

Of the poets of this period, those who deserve to be mentioned either on account of their popularity or quality of production, are Michal Gordon (1823-90), Benjamin Wolf Ehrenkranz, better known as Welvel Zbarzher (1819-84), Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908), S. J. Katzenelenbogen, Eliakim Zunzer (1840-1913), and M. M. Warshawski (1848-1907).

i. Michal Gordon was quite a popular poet in his time. The main motive of his poems was the didactic. Like many of the Haskalah writers and singers, he believed that the emancipation is bound to ar-

rive provided the Jews modernize their life. Accordingly, he wrote many poems wherein he calls upon his people to arise from their slumber and open their eyes to the light of civilization. In others he points out their faults and calls for changes in their life, and he ridicules superstition, Hassidism, and the ways of the ghetto. Later, though, when emancipation proved an illusion he turned to nationalistic motives. Besides from time to time he also indited poems on more popular motives, such as his wine song, *Die Mashke* (Liquor) and *Die Stifmutter* (The Stepmother), in which the plight of the orphan is pathetically told. In all these he is more a versifier and a publicist in rhyme than a poet, but in a number of lyric poems he displays greater talent. In these there is an individualistic note, for the themes are the life of the poet, God, the world, and the destiny of man, and his exalted thoughts on the subjects are beautifully expressed.

ii. Ehrenkranz was a well-known itinerant folk poet who was in great favor with the Jewish masses of Galicia and Rumania who called him by the name of his native town Zbarzh, Welvel Zbarzher. He was a prolific writer and composed numerous poems and songs. They were, however, never collected but for a long time circulated orally among the Jews of those countries. Most of his motives were taken from the daily life of the people, but several of his poems have more exalted themes. In one of them he asks the wind, the sea, the moon, and the stars, whether they know of a land where peace and justice reigns, where good people find rest and where the downtrodden are not oppressed. They all answer his query in the negative and the poet reaches the pessimistic conclusion that rest can be found only in heaven.

iii. Goldfaden, the creator of the Yiddish theatre, and one of its prolific dramatists was also a distinguished popular poet. Though he was educated in the atmosphere of the enlightenment movement—he was for several years a student at the Zhitomir Rabbinical Seminary—and was a friend of the leading *Maskilim* of the time, his poems are not permeated with the spirit of didacticism, and he finds little fault with the Jews. On the contrary, his themes are often the praise of the Torah, Jewish religion, and quite frequently assimilation and the assimilated Jews are the target of his wit in his satirical poems. When the national movement came into being Goldfaden wrote a number of nationalist poems glorifying the Jewish people, their power of survival,

and their longing for the land of their fathers, and calling upon them to return to Palestine. Most of his poems are adapted to the taste of the masses and many of them are inserted in his numerous dramas. Only very few of his poems have a lyric note.

iv. Zunzer, though possessing little poetic ability, was for a time the most popular folk singer of his day. His popularity was due partly to his profession which was that of *Badhan*, i.e. master of ceremonies and official entertainer at weddings and other festivities. As such, he had the opportunity to sing his own songs at gatherings and they were thus widely circulated. The themes of his poems are those which appealed to a large part of the people, such as the glorification of the Jewish nation, mild criticism of Jewish occupations, and disparagement of assimilation. At times, he wanders off into history and sings of the Exodus or of Moses and other heroes, or bewails the destruction of the Temple and the exile. The nationalistic movement found a strong echo in his songs and several of them, such as *Die Soche* (The Plough) and *Shibat Zion* (The Return to Zion) gained exceptionally wide popularity on that account. The former, which glorifies farming and the tilling of the soil as the most secure and blissful way of life, was a favorite song with the masses for over two decades, while the latter was equally popular at gatherings of the *Hobebé Zion*. Zunzer's poems have neither depth nor pathos, but they reflect the wishes, aspirations, and the views of a large stratum of the Jews at the time and they were, therefore, received with favor. The light form of his verse and the jingling quality of the rhymes also contributed considerably to his success as a folk poet.

v. Of a much higher calibre than the poets hitherto described is M. M. Warshawski. His themes resemble those of the other folk poets, but there is a loftier note in his poems. They are animated by a deep emotion which stemmed from the singer's love for his people and its spiritual heritage. His song, *Oifen Pripichek* (On the Hearth), is a veritable hymn to the Torah and its study. This poem is still sung at Jewish gatherings and seldom fails to touch a chord in the Jewish heart. Some of his poems are of a more individual character and are distinguished by their lyric strain.

73. I. L. PEREZ, S. FRUG, AND ABRAHAM REIZEN

i. With I. L. Perez, Yiddish poetry assumed a more mature and dignified form. It divested itself of its narrow folk garments and

donned clothes cut according to the modern European fashion. Perez is not as great a poet as a short story writer, yet the service he performed for Yiddish poetry was of merit. It was he who first introduced the note of individual expression in Yiddish poems, and it was he who widened its horizon to include not only Jewish motives but also those which belong to man as man. It was he who first sang of love as a mighty and deep human passion which ennobles the soul both by the joy of its fulfillment and the suffering at its frustration. In Perez's love poems, human beauty and charm are portrayed in a skilful manner. It is true that his love poems are greatly influenced by Heine's songs, and that in general, the emotion expressed in them is neither deep nor often genuine, yet they were new in Yiddish, and they, therefore, exerted an exhilarating influence.

He is more earnest and consequently more genuine and stirring in his social poems. The plight of the working class, the misery of the poor, their cheerless and hopeless outlook, and the social injustice going on in life found strong expression in Perez's poems. His poem, *Die Drei Neitorins* (The Three Seamstresses), is soul-gripping in its portrayal of the misery and the frustrated life of these seamstresses who have grown old in their life of hard work, a life in which they knew neither rest nor love. Similarly pathetic is his symbolic drama, *Bei Dem Fremden Hupah Kleid* (Somebody Else's Wedding Gown) in which the sorrowful life of the seamstresses is projected in its tragic aspects. Such poems were the symptoms of the time when the spirit of proletarian revolt was penetrating the ghetto.

Perez also drew upon Jewish history and the prophets of the Bible for themes and motives. He wrote several poems in which he assumes the prophetic tone of a seer, and a long poem, *Yochebed*, in which the mother of Moses is made to express the impassioned longing of the oppressed Jews for freedom.

Though he was animated in his poems more by a general human spirit than by a particular Jewish one—his poetic activity belongs to his earlier period of literary expression—yet the plight and destiny of his people form motives in a number of his poems. One of these, *Treist* (Comfort) is especially distinguished by its spirit of sympathy with Jewish suffering and of belief in the strength of the people. The poet essayed numerous forms of expression as he did in his prose writings, and among his productions are several ballads, the most important of which is *Monish*, in which the struggle of a pious young Jew against

the lure of the general world in the form of a beautiful young Gentile maiden, is masterfully depicted. The art of these ballads is impaired by long digressions on irrelevant subjects and by a lack of harmony, but on the whole, they enhance Perez's contribution to Jewish poetry.

ii. Totally different from Perez in tone, character, and type of poetic quality is S. Frug (1860-1916). This singer who was endowed with a feeling heart and inexhaustible fountain of love and sympathy for his unfortunate people, was born and raised in one of the Jewish agricultural colonies in Southern Russia in a non-ghetto atmosphere. His Jewish education was meager, yet he succeeded in saturating himself with the Jewish spirit and drawing inspiration from it to an exceptional degree. He distinguished himself as a poet in the Russian language but then also turned to Yiddish and made a notable contribution to its poetry. He is very close to the folk poets, inasmuch as the life of the people, its joys, and sorrows are his main motives. He has little interest in the individual, yet there is a strong note of individuality in him, for his wails and cries of anguish at the fate of his people issue from his soul, and the palpitation of his own wounded heart are heard in them.

Frug also has a kind of kinship with Bialik, for like this great Hebrew poet, he saw the Jewish tragedy in all its depth, though in a more limited way, and was so impressed by it that he saw hardly anything else. In the concluding stanza of his song *Schwer zu Zingen* (Difficult to Sing) he pathetically exclaims:

It is difficult to sing, my orphan,
When the storm of night howls,
When the chains clang and rattle,
And the executioner laughs and laughs.

This can serve as a motto for many of his poems which are cries of anguish. For a number of years he saw the bitter oppression of the Jews in Russia; he heard the cry of the wounded and maimed during the numerous pogroms; he felt the sting of humiliation and insult heaped upon his brethren by discriminations and decrees and he poured forth in his poems all the bitterness that accumulated in his heart at what he saw, heard, and felt. His Muse is, therefore, like the *Shekinah* of Israel, often dressed in black. In one of the bitterest moments of Russian Jewry, the poet cried out, not like Bialik, with wrath against his own brethren but with tears and a tone of pleading:

Brothers, sisters, have pity
Great and frightful is the need;
Give shrouds for the dead
And for the living bread.

These words were for years the slogan in every appeal made for suffering Jewry. In the same soul-stirring tone he wrote several other poems under the impression of the pogroms in 1906. At other times his tone is quieter but the gnawing pain in his heart at the continual suffering of his people finds expression in numerous ways. At times his sorrow assumes a bitter tone of irony as in his famous poem, *Samd un Steren* (Sand and Stars) in which the poet turns to God and asks the following question. Abraham was promised by Him that his children will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the shore of the sea (Gen. XXII, 17). The second half of the promise has been fulfilled; Israel is trodden under foot like the sand; but, Oh, where is the first half of the promise, the shining and bright stars?

At other times he turns his irony against his own brethren, whom he chastises for their deficiencies and shortcomings. Such are the long poem, *Die Papirene Briq* (The Paper Bridge) and the series *In Shmoniewke*, wherein he satirizes the life in the ghetto. These poems, true, lack the lofty tone of the prophet which we often hear in Bialik, and at times they are even tinged with a note of the burlesque, yet the reader feels that beneath their irony and satire there pulsates the deep sympathy of the poet for the misery of his brethren and there can be sensed the spirit of anguish which animates their lines. In short, Frug is primarily the poet of Jewish woe and misery who gave expression to the sufferings of a martyred people.

Still, hope and comfort are not unknown to him. Stirred by the national movement he penned a number of Zionist songs in which he expresses his belief in the survival of his people in spite of the endeavor of their enemies to destroy them, and he calls upon his brethren to rouse themselves from their slumber to activity on behalf of Zion. Again and again, the poet sings of hope and comfort, promising suffering Israel a brighter future or encouraging him in the bitter struggle of exile by portrayals of the happier past.

There are few nature poems in Frug's collection, but these few are permeated with a spirit of love for the beauty of God's world, and the portrayals of field and forest, sunrise and sunset and other natural

phenomena are done with the art of a master whose early life was spent on the broad steppes of Southern Russia.

Frug sang also of labor, liberty, and of the struggle of the poor and of legends of old. In all these there is much poetic feeling and art. But his strength and depth of pathos lie in his poems of woe and wrath at the fate of his beloved people.

iii. Abraham Reizen, the third distinguished poet of the period is, in some respects, the very contrary of Frug. He is primarily individualistic, although he at times expresses the sorrow of the life of others, and occasionally takes as a motive the plight of his nation. Most of the motives are taken from his own life. His Muse is quite modest. It does not soar high in flight and grapple with the deep problems of life and the world, nor does it explore nature and reveal to us its multifarious beauties, but is content to sing of the ups and downs of life. There is a marked note of sorrow in his poems. The poet bewails the lost innocence of his youth and of his pure belief which was his comfort. He tells us of the constant longing of his soul to rise to greater heights and of its forced groveling below; he mourns for a life passed in search of gold, the reward of which was only silver—the silver of his graying locks. In the same vein his love poems bewail loves lost or not realized. The few occasional nature poems that he penned are concerned more with the powerlessness of man in the face of mighty nature. It is in this category that his cycle of *Yam Lieder* belong. In general, there is a peculiar charm in Reizen's poems, for they possess an essentially human quality and his complaints and his sorrow are really shared by most of us whose lives flow in similar channels.

Reizen was not insensitive to the sorrow of others and he, therefore, sang feelingly of the life of the poor and the downtrodden. Especially popular are several of his poems which picture the plight and cheerless life of the poor *Yeshibah* student. Unlike Bialik who saw the inner light of that life in his famous poem, *ha-Matmid* (Sec. 28), Reizen sees only the gloomy exterior and he expresses its pathos in a very touching manner.

74. YOUNGER POETS

Reizen was followed by a host of younger poets, most of whom are from Russia and some of whom hail from Galicia. On the whole, there is much resemblance in their themes and poetic tone. The sor-

row of Jewish life, especially as it is reflected in the life of the town, is their burden. All of them were torn from their moorings, from the life of their youth which was spent in a religiously saturated atmosphere, and were thrown into a strange world in which they are ill-adjusted. They long for their old life but cannot resuscitate it, and they are constantly deploring their restlessness and striving towards goals which they can never reach. They also sing of love and of nature with commendable skill. Yet, their use of common motives does not impair the individuality of the poets, for each of them expresses similar feelings in a different fashion. The most distinguished among the poets are Perez Hirshbein (b. 1880), Moses Teitsch (b. 1884), L. Yaffe (b. 1875), David Einhorn (b. 1886), and I. Imber (b. 1889). Hirshbein, who later made a name as a dramatist (Sec. 75), wrote a number of poems of fine quality on folk themes, such as the poem, *Das Lied fun dem Nar* (The Song of the Fool), which are written in a satiric vein.

Teitsch is noted especially for his nature poems in which he draws with plasticity the portrait of the Lithuanian landscape as it appears in different seasons. Similar sketches of nature have been contributed by L. Yaffe who is otherwise noted as a nationalistic poet.

David Einhorn is no mean singer. He is, as he himself says in his poem, *Mein Heim* (My Home), which serves as a prologue to his collection, the poet of the Lithuanian Jewish town. He is saturated with the quiet wistfulness which hangs over both the drab Lithuanian countryside and the life of the town. He pictures with great skill the beauty of nature at various times and seasons, but here and there, he betrays the influence exerted upon him by Bialik. His strength lies in his Jewishness. His soul is deeply permeated with the "sorrow of a thousand generations" and what he expresses is only a small part of it. He feels that all that has been said about Jewish suffering by the poets does not express either its depth or its extent and in one of his poems, *Farschwechter Schweigen* (Desecrated Silence) he calls for dumb silence at the bitter fate of Israel. He is also saturated with love for the traditional type of Jewish life and grieves at the great number of Jews who have forsaken the old fortress. He exclaims in one of his poems, "We will remain in the Old Synagogue, the friend of Israel in all time and find there comfort and joy." Even his love poems are animated by a typically Jewish spirit. In his *Idiliye* he expresses the desire that his beloved shall be a daughter raised in one of the homes of the poor where the soul of the nation lives and suffers. He also

wrote a number of historical poems utilizing old legends or motives. These are distinguished by their art and deep pathos.

I. Imber is the best representative of the younger Galician poets. Genuine Jewishness is also his main asset and his poem, *Die Mame* (The Mother), is a veritable hymn to the Jewish mother whose nobility of soul is reflected in the light of the tiny candles kindled on the eve of the Sabbath. He also wrote a long historical poem, *Esterke*, singing of the love between the beautiful maiden of the Cracow ghetto and the Polish king, Kasimir.

To the number of singers who made contributions to Yiddish poetry belongs also Hayyim Nahman Bialik. His Yiddish songs are stamped with the same nationalistic spirit as his Hebrew poems, but many of them of which the song, *Unter die Grinenke Boimelech* (Under the Green Trees), is the most popular are impressed with the folk spirit. In this song the dreaminess and the longing reflected in the eyes of Jewish children are sung about and glorified.

75. DRAMAS

Dramas occupy an important place in the two principal literatures of the Jews during the modern period, the Hebrew and the Yiddish. In fact, the dramas of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (Vol. III, Sec. 17) represent the first modern productions in Hebrew literature, and as we have seen, he found numerous imitators during the entire Haskalah period. However, since Hebrew drama could not have possibly been produced on the stage in the countries of the Diaspora, the younger writers of the national epoch neglected that branch of literary expression and turned to more fertile fields. The case was different with the Yiddish literature. Yiddish being a spoken language, there was reason for the writers to hope that the dramas would eventually be produced on the stage. And as we have seen (Vol. II, Sec. 166) attempts at staging dramatized stories of Biblical episodes or crude comedies written in Judaeo-German were made as early as the first half of the seventeenth century, and Purim plays were an annual event in many German ghettos during the entire eighteenth century.

The Yiddish secular literature of the nineteenth century opens, like the Hebrew, with a drama which was curiously enough written by one who was a bitter opponent of Judaeo-German or Yiddish, Aaron Halle Wolfsohn (Vol. III, Sec. 19). This was his comedy, *Leichtsinn und Frömmerei* (Fickleness and Hypocrisy), which, in spite of its German

title and preface was written in the then current Judaeo-German. It was published at Amsterdam in the year 1798, with the intention, as the author indicates in the preface, of supplanting the less literary Purim plays on the stages of the Jewish communities.

We do not know whether his hope was ever realized, but, that with the extensive development of Yiddish literature in Eastern Europe during the last century he found numerous imitators who entertained similar hopes goes without saying. We have already noted the dramas of Ettinger, Israel Axenfeld, Mendele Moker Seforim and others. Undoubtedly there were still other writers who turned their hand to dramatic productions who have been forgotten by historians of literature.

Still, as long as there was no Jewish theatre in existence the production of dramas was simply a form of literary expression and consequently limited. The bloom of this species of literature begins with establishment of a Yiddish theatre in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The founder of the Jewish theatre was the above-mentioned poet, Abraham Goldfaden. In the early seventies he wrote light comedy and hoped to produce it, but for a number of years, while he remained in Russia, he could not realize his hope. In Rumania, though, in 1876, favorable circumstances made it possible to carry out his long cherished dream. The Rumanian Jewish population was of an heterogenous composition. It contained newly settled groups from neighboring countries, Russia, Galicia, and Austria. There was no standardized type of life, and on the whole, it was of a lighter mood. The Jews there, like the native Rumanians loved song and dance, and itinerant singers of popular songs found a favorable reception. Goldfaden saw his opportunity and with the help of a few of these singers who turned actors overnight he organized the first Jewish theatre. The first few performances proved a success, and the initiator was encouraged to continue his endeavors. The hastily improvised theatrical troupe began to visit various Jewish communities throughout Rumania, and almost everywhere they were enthusiastically received. For several years the Yiddish theatre prospered in Rumania. The years were those of the Russian-Turkish war, and Rumanian cities served as headquarters for large armies which were accompanied by a host of contractors and their clerks, and merchants of all kinds most of whom were Jews. This nondescript multitude was greatly attracted by the novel forms of

entertainment and patronized the Yiddish theatre. The success of Goldfaden soon prompted others to organize their own troupes and thus within a short time, there were several itinerant Yiddish theatres. With the end of the war, however, the situation changed and Goldfaden returned to Russia and made his Russian debut at Odessa in the year 1880.

The fortunes of the Yiddish theatre in Russia during the first years of its existence were varied, but on the whole, it did not strike root in Jewish life. The times were turbulent; these were years of pogroms and persecutions, and the Jewish masses for whom the theatre was primarily intended could not support it in the proper manner. This is not the place to relate the struggle of that institution for existence and development. Suffice it to say that they were numerous. The theatre suffered both from the lack of trained actors and an appreciative audience. Moreover, in 1883, the Czarist government banned the Yiddish theatre from Russia, and not until the beginning of the present century was it again permitted to exist in that country. The Yiddish theatre along with tens of thousands of Jews of Eastern Europe then emigrated to America and found a more permanent home in this country. But the story of its further development in the United States belongs to another chapter.

The establishment of the theatre, of course, conditioned the character of the Yiddish dramas which were henceforth written in profuse numbers. Since most of the dramas were composed with an eye for the stage, they had to be adapted to the standards of that stage and to the tastes of the audiences which frequented the performances. And both of these were very low. The theatre was a crude affair, the actors were untrained, and though some of them possessed histrionic ability they were grossly ignorant and lacked an aesthetic sense. The audience came primarily from the less educated and socially lower stratum of the Jewish population and they wanted only to be amused and entertained and not be edified or instructed. Consequently, the grosser the play, the more grotesque its plot, the more piquant its humor, the greater was its success. As a result, almost all plays written before 1900, with few exceptions, have hardly any literary value. Their very titles, *Schmendrik*, *Die Beide Kune Lemels* (both Shmendrik and Kuni Lemel are derogatory epithets for incapable men), *Eliyahu ha-Nawi's Shlof Mitzel* (Elijah's Nightcap), and the like indicate their character. Goldfaden was an able man and possessed a poetic vein,

but his practical sense made him adapt his dramas to the taste of his audience. The other prolific dramatic writers, such as Joseph Lateiner and Moses Hurwitz lacked talent altogether. Yet, in spite of their desire to adapt the plays to the tastes of the masses, the writers in the seventies and eighties of the last century had an ideal motive, the *Haskalah*. They all aimed to educate the people and show them the dire results of religious fanaticism on the one hand, and the benefits of enlightenment, on the other hand. Most of the plays, are, therefore, of the type in which the *Hassid* is the villain and the enlightened man the hero.

Goldfaden also wrote several historical dramas and operettas, among them *Shulamit* which is based on a Talmudic legend and *Bar Kokba*. But even in these he does not rise to literary heights. On the contrary, he injected in the historical episodes many modern features of a comic or lachrimose character, so as to make them more palatable to the audience. A characteristic feature of all the dramas of this period was the excessive number of songs and dances they contained. More effort was spent by the writers on these songs than on the construction of the plot. Thus, the circumstances in the first stage of development of the Yiddish theatre hindered their literary progress. We will now trace the further development of the drama in European Yiddish literature.

At the beginning of the present century the Yiddish theatre was resuscitated in Russia. At first plays were presented in a more or less unauthorized manner, but in 1904, a permit was granted by the government for the production of Yiddish plays and several Yiddish theatres were opened in Warsaw and other centers of Jewish population. The change in the quality of Yiddish literature which had taken place in the twenty years that had passed since the close of the Yiddish theatre in Russia was reflected in the drama. The old plays of Goldfaden's school gave way to new and better dramas, and a host of writers set their hand to preparing new material for the stage. Among them were Perez and Shalom Ash whose dramas have already been briefly referred to. Among the younger dramatists, both the most prolific and to a degree the most distinguished from a literary point of view is the above-mentioned Perez Hirshbein. He was greatly instrumental in improving the character of the Yiddish stage, for not only did he write dramas of a higher calibre, but he himself organized a troupe of actors which produced his own plays and those of other dramatists.

In Hirshbein's dramas there is nothing of the burlesque nor of the

melodramatic element with which the earlier plays were richly endowed. It was he who, as one of the critics and historians of the Yiddish theatre remarks,* took innocent, pure love as a motive in his dramas in marked contrast to the earlier dramas, in which sinful, illicit love was the main feature of the plots. Hirshbein found in the higher type of love a theme for both humor and pathos, and he particularly excelled in the latter. In a number of his dramas, such as *Tkhat Kaf* (Giving Surety), *Hava, Das Kind fun der Welt* (The child of the World), the entire plot centers around love. In the first two, the love between two innocent young people is the motive; in the last the sudden passion of a courtesan for a man whose soul had remained as pure as that of a child and who devotes his life to gladdening the hearts of children by inventing toys for them, is the theme. The contrast between the two polar characters is well brought out, though more in a series of dialogues than in action. These plays are tragedies but he also knew how to give a lighter turn to the same motive and he wrote several comedies which were produced with success and thus contributed to the rise of the Yiddish stage. In the *Nebelah* (The Carcass), the social motive, the awakening in the heart of an outcast the feeling of revolt against his fate and the surge of anger against those whom he considers the cause of his fall, looms large. Hirshbein also wrote a problem drama of great interest, on a typically Jewish question. In *Der Lexter* (The Last One), the principal character, Yehiel, the scion of a wealthy, scholarly, most distinguished family, overcome by the tragedy of the Jews, revolts against their fate. He expresses his revolt in a peculiar manner, by refusing to become a father and thus perpetuate the suffering. His resolution causes a rift in the family which ends in the insanity of his young and loving wife. He, however, remains adamant to all pleadings. He constantly reiterates that suffering is no glory and that it must be abolished from the face of the earth and that if a people is destined to eternal suffering it is better that it disappear than continue to carry the burden. We may differ with that philosophy, but that in the light of late events it presents a problem, there is no doubt. The fine dialogue which characterizes most of Hirshbein's dramas and which is interspersed with philosophic remarks and in the comedies with humorous sallies, enhance their value.

* B. Gorin in *Geschichte fun Iddischen Teater*, Vol. II, p. 243, N. Y., 1929.

76. *ESSAYS AND CRITICISM*

Yiddish literature for a long time consisted only of belletristic production both in prose and in poetry, for as stated, it was primarily intended for the masses and appealed more to the emotions than to the intellect. But with the beginning of the present century there entered a change in the attitude of the writers. The rise of the level of literature through the works of gifted writers, the striving on the part of the more radical element in Jewry to raise the language of the masses to the state of a national language, the desire of the leaders of the national movement to propagate its ideals in that language—all these brought about a widening of the scope of that literature. Numerous periodicals, many weeklies, several monthlies, and even one or two dailies began to appear, and when these, for one cause or another, became defunct, others took their place. As a result, the publicistic and critical branches of literature began to flourish. Many were the writers who tried their hand at publicistic articles and criticism. But the majority of these writers were no new literary personalities. They were mostly veteran Hebrew writers who extended their activity to Yiddish, either for the purpose of propagating the Zionist ideal, or for the purpose of expressing themselves in the language of the masses. Among them were Joseph Luria, who edited the Zionist Yiddish weekly, *Der Yud*, for a number of years, I. H. Rabnizki, S. Rosenfeld, R. Brainin, David Frishman, and many others, all of whom contributed much to Yiddish publicistic literature.

However, there later appeared a number of writers whose field of literary activity was mainly Yiddish. In addition, the famous belletrists, Perez, Ash, and Nomberg, also occasionally turned to criticism and publicistic writing. Of these new talents the most important are E. Elyashew, S. Niger, and H. Zhitlowski. The first is both essayist and critic, the second mainly critic, and the third primarily essayist.

E. Elyashew, known better under the pseudonym *Ba'al Maḥshabot* (A Thinking Man) wrote a large number of essays, of a publicistic and critical nature, which were later collected in three volumes. Although he was not officially affiliated with the Zionist movement he was thoroughly animated by the national spirit, and his numerous essays are impressed with that spirit. He seldom discusses political or social, or economic questions, but devotes himself mainly to the spiritual phase

of Jewish life. In brief and poignant articles he either points out its dark features or portrays the brighter spots of that life, especially of its traditional aspects which unfortunately were already in the process of disintegration. Thus, he wrote a group of essays on the Sabbath and the festivals, in which poetry and reflection are judiciously mingled. The essays in which Jewish life is criticized are seasoned with a good deal of irony but not of the bitter kind, for his entire approach was one of love and sympathy. In fact, he himself, says, "Criticism arises in the life and literature of people only when simultaneously with it there rises hope for improvement and better times."*

Brevity and the impress of nationalism are also the principal characteristics of Elyashew's essays in literary criticism. He lays great stress upon the influence of the heritage of the nation upon the writer, his relation to those who have gone before and to the contemporary spiritual and cultural situation. It is primarily in the light of the complete environment that he judges literary productions, although he at times turns his attention to the delineation of the personality and psychology of the writer. Elyashew was one of the first who raised Yiddish criticism to a higher level and made it an important branch in that literature.

While to Elyashew essay writing and literary criticism was primarily an avocation, for he was by profession a physician, to S. Nizer it is his vocation, and he consequently devotes his entire energy to his works. As a result, he is the most prolific essayist and critic in Yiddish. And not only is he the most prolific but the most earnest and enthusiastic, for as a champion of Yiddishism he sees in the development of that literature an original expression of the Jewish genius and considers it a means of Jewish survival. Hence his entire approach to his criticism as well as his method are different than that of Elyashew. His critical studies, for he is primarily not a reviewer but a student and scholar of literature, are not limited to one phase of the writer's literary expression but are comprehensive and aim to reveal the complete set of circumstances, internal and external, which gave birth to the particular productions. This tendency is especially evident in his longer essays on Perez, Ash, Shalom Aleikem, and particularly in his book on Mendele where the study of the personality of this leading writer and his works is carried out in great detail. However, it is also noted, though in a lesser degree, in his shorter essays on other writers, and

* Collected Works, Vol. II, p. 72.

these are numerous for there is hardly a Yiddish writer of talent whose works have not been discussed by this critic.

His enthusiasm for the writers and the works which he studies adds a lyric note to the essays, and many a passage is more poetical than critical, a characteristic which adds charm and suppleness to the essays. However, the poetic strain which expresses itself in a multitude of fine phrases and winged sentences at times clouds the thought and prevents the critic from pronouncing his views clearly and precisely.

Niger also wrote many essays on general literary questions, all aiming to guide the reader and to develop his taste for good literature. He thus greatly enriched, and still continues to do so, the field of Yiddish literary criticism in particular and that of literature in general.

Among the few who made important contributions in the field of literary study and criticism S. L. Zitron should also be counted, for he performed a service for Yiddish literature similar to the one he accomplished for Hebrew literature. His three volume work, *Drei Literarische Doires* (Three Generations of Literature), contains biographical essays and reminiscences of numerous interesting episodes in the lives of leading writers, both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. Some of them throw much light on the conditions and circumstances under which certain literary works were produced. The work, as a whole, is valuable from both the historical and the literary point of view.

CHAPTER VIII

JEWISH LITERATURE IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

77. *INTRODUCTORY*

We have hitherto surveyed the expressions of Jewish literary genius in Hebrew and Yiddish, the two languages which are not only the best known to the greater part of the Jewish people but are most suitable for such expression, the former because it is the national language of the people, and the latter because, through the generations, it has absorbed much of the essence of the spirit of Israel. But Jewish literature, as is well known, is not limited to these languages. Like the Jews themselves, it is polyglot and speaks many tongues. There is hardly a European language in which there has not been created during the last one hundred and thirty years a considerable number of works which by their content and form belong to Jewish literature, for they were written by Jews and they reflect Jewish life in all its variegated forms. It is, therefore, meet that we turn our attention to these branches of Jewish literature or rather miniature Jewish literatures, survey their rise and development, and obtain a glimpse of the types of spirit which animated them.

These literatures are, of course, subjected to the influence of the languages in which they were written and to the cultures of which they form a part. As a result, they do not display that originality of Jewishness which the Hebrew and Yiddish literatures possess. But this deficiency is to a degree compensated by the heterogeneity and variety of Jewish life reflected in them. The Hebrew and Yiddish literatures are, as we know, products of East-European Jewry, and consequently the life reflected in them, in spite of the diversity of motives and points of view of the writers, bears a monotonous character on the whole. These literatures, on the other hand, due to the very conditions of the time and place of their production, portray not one type of life but several which differ in tone, character, and color. Moreover, they deal not with the Jew within and on the border of the

ghetto, but with the Jew who left the ghetto behind him a generation or two ago and is struggling to maintain his integrity in a world antagonistic to his Jewishness. True, this particular portrayal is not the rule with all the writers in the European languages, for many of them still hover around the ghetto and descend into it in search of subjects and themes for their stories and novels. But even the ghetto life is portrayed from a different angle, from the point of view of a man whose vision has been made keen by observation in a larger world. He, therefore, may detect certain nuances in that life which are hidden from one who has been saturated with that spirit from his very youth.

As a rule, the producers of Jewish literature in the European languages in Western Europe were men who distinguished themselves as novelists, or poets, or essayists in the literatures of their native countries. Their Jewish works were more of a by-product than the main product of their genius. Russian Jewish literature forms the only exception. This literature, produced in the midst of a large and compact Jewry whose life was kept in its pristine integrity, could not escape the influence of the social pattern, and consequently, the writers, though primarily assimilationists, yet made Jewish literature their main vocation. It is for this reason that Jewish literature in the European languages, in spite of the fact that a number of its producers were distinguished literati, can boast only of a few works, whether in prose or in poetry, which can compare in depth of pathos, breadth of outlook, and genuineness of spirit with the better types of works in Hebrew or Yiddish. Only the Russo-Jewish poet, S. Frug, can favorably compare with many a Hebrew poet. The Anglo-Jewish novelist and short story writer, Israel Zangwill, also approaches the standard of the best Hebrew and Yiddish writers and for similar reasons, for he too lived to a large degree in an atmosphere saturated with the spirit of Jewish life. All the other writers, notwithstanding the fact that the more distinguished among them carried over their elegance of style and their knowledge of literary technique into their Jewish works, did not succeed in producing exceptional works, as these reflected but a portion rather than the totality of their personalities.

These literatures are limited not only in quality but also in quantity and in scope. The number of readers of these literatures, due both to the smaller number of Jews in West-European countries and to the disinterestedness of many of them in Jewish matters, was small, and the limited demand conditioned the supply. Similarly, these condi-

tions also affected the scope of the works. With the exception of German, these literatures were, during the greater part of the period, limited to belles-lettres. In that language alone is the range of Jewish literature comparatively wide, for it includes numerous works on all phases of knowledge. In all of these literatures, publicistic articles and essay writing occupied an unimportant part.

The situation has changed, though, during the last four decades. With the rise of the national movement which brought about an intensifying of Jewish life in the Jewries of Western Europe and with the emigration of thousands of East-European Jews to Germany, France, and England, and hundreds of thousands to this country, a change came into all these literatures, and especially into the German and English. Their scope was widened, their quantity increased, and their quality improved. A veritable revival took place and the several literatures began to exert a marked and wholesome influence upon the life of world Jewry and to mould its character to a very large degree.

With these preliminary remarks we will turn to the survey of the literatures and begin with the German-Jewish which is the oldest in time, most prolific in quantity, and highest in quality.

78. HEINE THE JEW

Heinrich Heine (1797-1865) used to boast that he was "one of the first men of the century," meaning thereby that he was born, at the turn of the century, in 1800. This claim was disproved. It is now definitely known that he was born three years earlier. But while we can discard the time element, we can impute to the phrase another meaning and say that he was really one of the first men of importance in the nineteenth century as far as literature is concerned. With the exception of Goethe and Schiller there was hardly another German poet and writer who held the attention of the literary world for three quarters of a century as much as Heine. Whether he was admired, or on the contrary, maligned and attacked, he was always a center of interest. And it would be no exaggeration to assert that much of his personality was due to his Jewishness, for in spite of the fact that he abjured the religion of his fathers at the age of twenty-eight and that he often expressed himself in uncomplimentary terms about the Jews and also to a degree about Judaism, he always remained a Jew to the very core of his soul. Though he applied to himself the epithet "a Jewish poet" in a rather mocking tone, it is nevertheless a truism,

for with all his worldliness, his criticism, his vaunted atheism, and Hellenism he remained a Jewish poet, if not always in content then in esprit or in some indefinable quality. Even the wit and humor for which he was so renowned have a Jewish ring. However, it is not our intention to give an estimate of Heine's poetry and prose writings even from a Jewish point of view. This belongs to the history of German rather than Jewish literature. We will limit ourselves to the few Jewish works of the poet and to the conflict within his soul which was a result of his Jewishness and which gave birth to the human tragedy named Heine.

Heine's inner conflict represents in a typical and exaggerated manner the conflict which goes on in the soul of every assimilated Jew who endeavors to escape Judaism but finds that the age-long heritage cannot be shaken off too easily except at a great sacrifice. This conflict does not always reach tragic proportions and is dependent upon a complex of various factors, such as personal character, the degree of Jewishness of the environment, the temper of the age, and other conditions. In the case of Heine, there existed a peculiar combination of circumstances which heightened the conflict into a tragedy thus embittering the life of this gifted man. First, there was the personal equation, the volatile paradoxical character, a curious blend of romantic and realistic, aristocratic, and democratic elements, to which were added extreme sensitivity, self-love, sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden, a longing for the heroic, and genuine reverence for the good and noble. Second, there was the environment of the boy Heine which was more Jewish than it is usually supposed to have been. Jewish life in Germany at the beginning of the last century was still maintained to a large extent in its traditional integrity, at least in such small towns as Düsseldorf. The Heine family, though affected by the liberal spirit of the time, still conducted the home in accordance with Jewish tradition. The father, Samson, was an observant Jew, and for a time was even president of the *Hebrah Gemillat Hassadim and Hebrah Tehilim* (A Free Loan and Psalm Reciting Society),* one which was common in every Jewish *Kehillah* in Germany. Heine was trained in his early youth in the good traditional manner, and for two years even attended a

* Untermeyer in his biography of Heine entitled *Paradox and Poet*, p. 16, calls it "The Society for performing humanitarian acts and Psalm reciting." While the second part is correct, the first is misleading. Almost every *Gemillat Hassadim* was founded for the purpose of lending money to indigent members without interest. Such a loan is still called in Yiddish vernacular *Gemillat Hessed*.

Heder. All these influences left an indelible impression upon his young soul which lasted through life and when he later wrote mockingly, "I have always had a great weakness for the Jews" he spoke the truth. Soon, however, he was taken from the *Heder* and was sent to a monastic school conducted by liberal Jesuits, for Düsseldorf was at the time under French rule, and the spirit of the Revolution had found an echo even in the Catholic school. The teachers, though outwardly pious were free in thought, and this curious mixture of free thought and Catholicism added to the conflict between the teachings of the *Heder* and the monastic school, created a religious vacuum in the soul of Heine. Yet the early impressions did not fade. He carried them with him into the great world, for even when he moved, as a youth, in circles of irreligious and assimilated Jews he was still in a Jewish environment. Heine used a considerable number of Hebrew words and phrases in his letters, which although they do not testify to his mastery of Hebrew, prove his closeness to Jewish life. Even as late as 1823, two years before his conversion, he wrote to Moser complaining of the hardness of the *Mazẓot* which he was forced to eat since he boarded with a Jew.

To these layers of conflicting experiences, the Jewishness of his early youth, the levity of his teachers at the monastery towards religion, the indifference to Judaism in assimilated circles, there was added the one of struggle against social and political discriminations. The impetuous youth who felt the strength of his growing poetic wings and who dreamt of becoming famous and acquiring a position in German literature, soon found himself in a strange and hostile world. The short respite which the Jews enjoyed under the Napoleonic rule in parts of Germany was followed by the post-war reaction, which revived both the spirit of patriotism and the old hatred towards the Jews. The echoes of the pogroms in a number of German cities in the year 1819 reached Heine in his student retreat at Bonn. He saw his way barred and only one path open, that which led to the baptismal font. It was then that bitterness at his fate entered his heart and generated that unconscious but nevertheless strong longing to escape Judaism and all that it entails. This bitterness was aggravated by the sharp barb inflicted by his beloved cousin, Amelia, the daughter of his uncle, Solomon Heine when she jilted him. The poet never forgot his first love, and though he never stated it openly, he charged this too to the Jews if not to Judaism, namely to their commercialism even in matters of the heart. He was rejected, he thought, because of his poverty. All these experiences

created the feeling of rebellion against a destiny imposed upon him by generations and increased his longing to escape it all. But the more he tugged at his bonds, the stronger they proved to be, and the greater the struggle, the fiercer the rebellion, the greater the tragedy. Heine, during the greater part of his life did not make peace with his fate nor could he overcome the attraction of his heritage. And this is the source of his contradictory attitude towards Jews and Judaism, which at one moment leads him to rage against them, and at another to sing panegyrics to both. Only after years of suffering—both moral and physical—did spiritual peace enter his soul, but it was too late to heal the wounds of a tragic life.

Against this background we will briefly survey the literary expression of the conflict in the soul of the poet. It is primarily reflected in many of the letters he wrote to his friends, but there are also a considerable number of passages scattered in his general works, especially in his prose writings which display his constant vacillation between rebellion at his Jewishness and love for it.

One of his early poems, *Belschazzar*, has as its theme the description of a dramatic scene from the Book of Daniel, the confusion of Belshazzar, King of Babylon, in the midst of the great feast when he saw the fateful writing on the wall. According to Heine's own testimony he wrote this poem when he was not yet sixteen years old, around the year 1813, and he was moved to compose it by the recitation on Passover night of the poem by the early Paitan, Jannai (Vol. I, Sec. 119), *wa-Yehi ba-Haẓi ha-Lailah* (And Thus It Happened at Midnight), in which all the miraculous events which took place on Passover night are enumerated, among them also the famous writing on the wall. Thus, we see young Heine still in his Jewish environment. But soon his rebellion began. Embittered by his failure as a merchant and by his rejection by his cousin Amelia, he poured forth his wrath against the Jews, and writing to a friend in 1820, he says, "The Jews are a sorrowful subject of discussion."¹ Still during the years 1820-1825, which embraced the student years at Göttingen, when the poet prepared himself for the legal profession, he was greatly interested in Judaism, though his revulsion against the assimilated Jews grew daily. Though he proclaimed his irreligiosity loudly, he yet preferred the old traditional type of Judaism to its modernized form, the Reformed version. In spite of the contradictions and paradoxes which beset his soul he secretly strove for

¹ *Confessio Judaica*, p. 90.

wholeness and anything which displayed that quality had an attraction for him. And in his essay on the Polish Jews written in the year 1822, after a short visit to that country, he evinces great sympathy for these Jews notwithstanding his disgust with their unattractive exterior and their ignorance of European culture. He concludes that essay with the following statement, "The Polish Jew with his ragged coat, unkempt beard, smell of garlic, with his jargon dialect is still dearer to me than some of the German Jews in all their glory."² In the same year he joined the "Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews" (Vol. III, Sec. 66), founded by a number of well-meaning intellectuals among whom were Leopold Zunz (Vol. III, Sec. 66), Eduard Gans, and Moses Moser. The purpose of the society was to stem the tide of conversion and to regenerate Judaism. This lofty ideal attracted him though he did not believe in its realization. The romanticism of the attempt and the earnestness of some of the members, like Zunz and a few others, imparted a special charm to the Society in the eyes of Heine. His association with these men strengthened his Jewishness; he became interested in Jewish history, planned to write a great Jewish novel, and drew up the outline for his unfinished story, *Der Rabbi von Bachrach*. But soon the bubble burst, the Society disbanded, the tide of conversion swept many of its former members and Gans, the president, was the first to forsake the fold. This happening was a great shock to Heine. Being gifted with a sense for truth, though he did not always follow it, he saw all the hollowness of the Reform movement of the time, and he made it the butt of his biting humor, for in his exaggerated manner, he attributed its rise entirely to the spiritual weakness of the modern Jews who could no longer bear the rigor of old Judaism nor withstand hatred.³ But he was more enraged by the movement of conversion. He saw its falsity and the commercial motive behind it. Conversion became for a number of years his veritable nightmare. In letter after letter to his friends, Wohlwill and Moser, he poured out his bitterness against all new Christians and at times spoke against Christianity in exaggerated and uncomplimentary terms. Nor did he spare God Himself for allowing His chosen people to forsake their nationality, for he scoffingly asked, "Did the ancient Count of Sinai become enlightened, abjure His own nationality, and give up His claims and His followers for some vague cosmopolitical ideas?"⁴ When he heard that Gans was advising

² Ibid., p. 12.

³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

his friends to embrace Christianity, he became furious and wrote to Moser, saying, "If he does it out of conviction, he is a fool, if out of hypocrisy, then he is a scoundrel."⁵ He even indited a poem against his former friend entitled *To An Apostate*, which expresses the bitterness of his spirit and his revulsion against baptism. Thus:

How the holy zeal of youth
Dies with all its gay defiance;
Compromise instead of truth
Calls on God for alliance.
Now the weeks pronounce the loss
That your soul had never mourned so,
And you creep up to the cross
To the very cross you scorned so.⁶

This bitterness, however, did not restrain Heine himself from embracing Christianity only a few months after Gans, in August, 1825, and for the very same reason as the former, so that he might be able to practice law or obtain a professorship. Still, there was a difference between the two. Gans contemplated the act indifferently while Heine considered his conversion a bitter necessity which he always rued. Two years before his conversion when he foresaw its inevitability he wrote to Moser, "I now understand the words of the Psalmist, 'O, God, give me my daily bread lest I blaspheme Thy name.'"⁷ A few months after his conversion he wrote to the same friend telling him that he would be sorry if Moser would consider his conversion in a better light than that of Gans. He further said, "I assure you that were the law to allow stealing of silver spoons, I would not have converted myself."⁷ A year later he wrote to the same friend that the words of the Psalmist, "May my right hand wither if I forget thee, O Jerusalem" are his motto too, all of which serves to demonstrate his deep feeling of Jewishness at the time of his conversion.

The twenty odd years between 1825 and 1849 were stormy ones for Heine. These were years of prolific production, years in which his fame spread far and wide, but simultaneously hatred, malignment, and attacks against him increased and embittered his soul. In this hectic condition, Heine frequently passed from mood to mood. What he

⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶ Translation taken from Untermeyer's *Paradox and Poet*, p. 129.

* The quotation is a paraphrase of parts of Prov. XXX, 5. Heine erroneously attributed it to the Psalmist.

⁷ Confessio Judaica, p. 19.

praised today he would often scoff at and criticize on the morrow and vice versa. His attitude towards Judaism during the period was also changeable. In a moment of distress, he made one of his characters say, "Das Judenthum ist gar keine Religion sondern ein Unglück" (Judaism is not a religion but a misfortune), and again even as late as 1842 he indited his poem, *The New Jewish Hospital in Hamburg*, in which he wrote:

Burdened forever by the threefold evil:
Poverty, and pain, and Judaism,
And of the three the last is the most malignant,
An old disease, a sort of family ailment.*

At other times he wrote beautiful eulogies about the Bible which he called "A book wide and encompassing as the universe itself," and said that the Jews should feel compensated for the loss of their land by the possession of the Bible. Occasionally he asserted the supremacy of the Hellenic spirit and proclaimed himself a Hellene, but simultaneously he extolled the beauty of the Jewish Sabbath and marveled at the immortality and endurance of the Jew.

The change in his attitude came in 1849 when his sickness was intensified and he became an invalid. Then he declared that he is no more "the first German besides Goethe," no more Hellene, but a poor, sick Jew, and commended his brother to the attention of the "God of our fathers."

From that year on his turbulent soul was calmed and his inner struggle subsided. Once more, as in his boyhood, he returned to his God. He who had prided himself on his irreligiosity now acknowledged his belief in God and immortality, and henceforth expressed his love and admiration for Jews and Judaism. Of Moses he said, "How small did Mount Sinai appear when Moses stood on it." As for the Jews he was now convinced that the Greeks were only beautiful youths, while the Jews were men of great stamina and unbending spirit. In long passages replete with love and admiration for his people and its spirit he extolled both the qualities of the Jews and the humanity of the Jewish law. With his characteristic penetration he saw correctly the pathos of the modern Jew, and while he saw the beauty of earlier Jewish history, he declared the history of the modern Jew tragic. With equal insight he probed into the fundamental cause of Judaophobia and found it to be the weakness of the Jew. "This word," said he, "can be placed as a

* Trans. taken from Untermeyer, p. 97.

motto at the beginning of a history of the Jews, and it explains their tragic march through the centuries." Thus did he atone in his last days for his rebellion against his Jewish fate and his flippant attitude towards his people and his faith.

Heine expressed his Jewishness not only in many passages scattered through his prose and poetry, but in a number of prose and poetic writings on Jewish themes. To the first belong the three chapters of his unfinished novel, *Der Rabbi von Bachrach*, which he began during his student days at Göttingen in the early twenties but never completed. As we learn from his letters, he studied for a time and read old documents. It was his intention to portray Jewish life in the Mediaeval Ages on a large scale and to present its noble spirit in its full expression. This was not carried out. We have only the beginning which tells of the flight of the Rabbi and his wife, the beautiful Sarah, from the city of Bachrach on the first night of Passover in the midst of the *Seder* celebration on account of a blood accusation, and of their arrival in the Frankfort ghetto on the first day of the holiday. The chapter contains beautiful descriptions of the Passover night celebration as well as of the holiday in the ghetto which are drawn not only with skill but with love and sympathy. Unfortunately, that is all, for there is little development in the plot.

To the Jewish poetic works belongs the group of poems entitled *Hebräische Melodien* (Hebrew Melodies) of which *Prinzessin Sabbath* (Princess Sabbath) and *Jehudah ben Halevi* are the best. In these two poems, Heine poured forth the love for his people that always glowed in his heart in spite of his aberrations, as well as his sympathy for their misery. With his keen poetic eye he saw the beauty of the inner life of the ghetto hidden beneath an ugly exterior. *Princess Sabbath* is an ode to that day which did so much to preserve the Jewish people from extinction. He sought to immortalize its holiness by the poetic figure of the enchanted prince who ceases on that day to lead the life of a dog which is his share during the week and turns prince again. In his enthusiasm he sings of the Sabbath as follows:

Pearl and flower of all beauty
Is the princess. Not more lovely
Was the famous Queen of Sheba,
Old bosom friend of Solomon.

The long poem, *Jehudah ben Halevi*, in spite of its name, is not a single poem but a collection of poems containing a gallery of exquisite

portraits on which the bard lavished his skill and talent. Not only is Halevi sung of with love and passion but also Gabirol, Moses' Ibn Ezra, and other singers of the Golden Age. Moreover, Jewish literature in its two great streams, Halakah and Agada, comes in for its share of exaltation. Nor does the poet forget Zion and the longing of the exiles for the distant land. In addition, there are in the usual Heine manner, many extraneous subjects, for the poet flits from subject to subject, but the center of all this manifold panorama remains Halevi for whom he had a special love and whom he singled out from the numerous spirits he saw in vision, as he says:

Yes, a great and famous poet
 Star and torch to guide his time
 Light and beacon of his nation;
 Was a wonderful and mighty.
 True and pure, and without blemish
 With his singing, like his soul—
 The creator having made it,
 With his work contented
 Kissed the lovely soul, and echoes
 Of that kiss forever after
 Thrilled through all the poet's numbers
 By that gracious deed inspired.

It was to him and his memory that Heine offered that wonderful wreath of flowers of his poetry, exquisite in beauty and shimmering in splendor, known as *Jehudah ben Halevi*.

As he himself predicted, no mass was sung nor Kaddish recited by others on the day he died, but instead the *Hebrew Melodies* which he himself sang are still sung and recited and still evoke the memory of the tragic poet in the heart of many a Jew.

79. BÖRNE, AUERBACH, FRANZOS, AND KOMPERT

What was said about Heine's Jewishness and his inner soul conflict, can hardly be applied to his contemporary, his friend and opponent who, like the poet, was considered a leader of the young Germany of the day, Ludwig Börne (1786-1837). It is true that he also suffered for his Jewish origin and paid dearly for the unpardonable crime of having been born in the Frankfort ghetto. But the suffering was entirely due to external causes, the attacks and vituperations of his enemies. Inwardly he was calm and his soul was little perturbed by his estrangement from his people and faith. He felt no qualms of

conscience when he changed his name from Baruch to Börne or even when he converted himself in the year 1816. True he was not ashamed of his Jewish origin and once in answer to an attack by an opponent he declared, "I do not grieve that I was born a Jew, on the contrary, I would not have been worthy to live were I to complain of the grace bestowed upon me by God to be both a Jew and a German, and thus partake of the excellences of both peoples." But he contemplated his conversion with equanimity and considered it a matter of expediency.

His contribution to Jewish literature is, therefore, slight and consists primarily of several brochures written before his conversion, at the urgency of his father and friends, in defense of the Jews. These are: *Aktenmässige Darstellung des Bürgerrechts der Israeliten* (Documented Presentation of the Case of Citizenship Rights of the Israelites in Frankfurt); *Für die Juden* (On Behalf of the Jews); and *Die Juden und ihre Gegner* (The Jews and their Opponents). In these works, Börne champions the cause of the Jews with great skill and talent and employs the art of keen satire, with which he was endowed, to great advantage. Even later when he had already officially separated himself from his people and faith, he frequently championed the cause of his brethren in numerous articles and reviews. But it was more the love of justice and liberty in general which animated his defense of the Jews and inspired his polemics against their calumniators than the sorrow at the Jewish tragedy. He was, however, not entirely unmindful of that, and both in a poem and in a story entitled *Der Roman*, he attempted to give expression to more genuine Jewish feelings, but even in these it is more the material suffering that he deplors rather than the spiritual. Börne, unlike Heine, was a Jew by birth more than by spirit and soul kinship.

ii. Neither the tragic conflict between Jew and German which raged in the heart of Heine, nor the coolness of Börne to Jews and Judaism was shared by the other outstanding German Jewish writers of the last century. They succeeded in harmonizing in their personalities the heritage of their race with the culture of their environment and in enriching both. Of such writers the well-known German novelist and short story writer, Berthold Auerbach (1812-1882), is an illustrious example.

Auerbach was born in the village of Nordstetten in the Schwarzwald district of the Duchy of Würtemberg. He at first received a Jewish education at home and then was sent by his father to the *Yeshibah* at

Hechingen where he studied for two years in order to prepare himself for the Rabbinate. He soon forsook theology and turned to jurisprudence which in turn he gave up for philosophy and literature. His first literary works dealt entirely with Jewish subjects. In 1836 he published his brochure, *Das Judenthum und die neueste deutsche Literatur* (Judaism and Recent German Literature) in which he ably defended Judaism against all charges made in the literature of the day. This was followed by the *Galerie ausgezeichneter Israeliten* (A Gallery of Distinguished Israelites) consisting of biographies and sketches of the lives of prominent Jews in Germany. A few years later he composed the novels, *Spinoza* (1837) and *Dichter und Kaufman* (Poet and Merchant) (1839). From 1840 on Auerbach devoted himself to the portrayal of German life, especially the life of the peasants of South Germany. His *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* earned him great popularity. His forty years work in the field of German literature gave him both fame and wealth, and as he himself expressed it, the former *Yeshibah* student became the favorite and companion of dukes and princes and even of queens.

Yet in all these vicissitudes of his life he remained the loyal devoted Jew who loved his people with the fullness of his great heart and cherished the traditions of his faith, though, as a follower of Spinoza, he did not subscribe to them nor did he observe them. His intense Jewishness is revealed to us in a glowing manner in the two volume collection of letters to his friend, Jacob Auerbach, published in 1884. From these we see that not only did he have his three sons visit the Reformed Jewish Temple and have them confirmed there as he says, "in order to bring them closer to their brethren in faith," but that the interests of Jews and Judaism occupied him daily for decades. In one of his letters he relates that during the Damascus affair in 1840 he did not sleep many nights on account of his vexation at the event. In 1868, aroused by the persecutions of the Jews in Rumania, he volunteered to go to that country together with Moses Montefiore to survey the situation and to devise ways and means for the alleviation of Jewish suffering. In the following year at the time of the famine in Russia, he was active in relief undertakings and enlisted the help of several princes of Germany on behalf of the Jews. Again and again he interested himself in the fate of the Rumanian Jews and arranged meetings which he and other notables addressed in order to arouse the world conscience against the outrages. With the rise of anti-Semitism

in the seventies of the last century the writer's activity grew feverish. He felt bitterly disappointed in his humanitarian hopes and in his reliance on German liberalism. His cries of woe grew more pathetic. He actually could not believe that such things could take place in his beloved Germany. He attempted to counteract the rising tide of Jew hatred by articles in journals, but he soon grew despondent. He then planned to return again to Jewish work and made several outlines for a novel in which the vicissitudes of Judaism during the century would be portrayed, but it was never written. The open outbursts of anti-Semitism on the part of Bismarck and the pogroms in Russia broke his heart and he succumbed to illness on the eighth of February, 1882.

It is interesting to note that, though Auerbach was as conscious of his Germanism as any German patriot, he never contended that his connection with Jews and Judaism was based merely on a common faith, but always expressed an unconscious Jewish nationalism. He says in one place, "The Christians have dogmas and must confess some principle; we Jews are Jews through history and through birth."

Auerbach's novels on Jewish themes were written in his youth before his literary talent had developed to its full capacity and, consequently, they are inferior in artistic finesse to his later productions. In general, his power lay in the portrayal of contemporary life rather than in the reconstruction of historical characters and the life of the past. As a result, his *Spinoza* in which he attempts to tell of the life of the great philosopher and portray his environment, is not distinguished either by historical insight or by psychological penetration. The book is replete with episodes of Spinoza's life in his youth and possesses a romantic glamor but the character of the future philosopher, the man of deep and systematic thought is hardly touched upon. Nor is the description of the Amsterdam ghetto in which the philosopher was born and reared true to its historical character, for it is more nearly a picture of the ghetto of the writer's day.

Auerbach was more successful in the second novel, *Dichter und Kaufman*, of which the German Jewish poet, Ephraim Kuh (1731-1790) is the hero. The purpose of the author in this story was to delineate the first attempts of the Jews to emerge from the ghetto, both the physical and spiritual, with all its concomitant results, and he therefore chose the tragic figure of Ephraim Kuh, one of the early rebels against the spirit of the ghetto as the hero. Ephraim, the son of a respectable and leading merchant of Breslau, is a dual personality. He

is endowed with a poetic soul which strives for beauty and freedom, but that soul is crushed by the environment which is saturated with the spirit of practical expediency and compromise. He is too weak to overcome the influence of his environment, as well as the heritage of his race, the bent to intellectuality, and thus a struggle rages in his soul between his idealism, inclination towards intellectuality and practicality. Tragedy ensues. Early in life he rebels against the fate of the Jews and against the ghetto in both its material and spiritual forms. The rebellion grows stronger with the years; still he does not leave the ghetto. His brothers, after their father's death, gradually escape it, and one by one forsake their faith and their people, but Ephraim remains. He longs for love and family life, but does not attain his goal. He has many love affairs; in each case, though, he tests the affair in the light of reason and practicality and it ends in separation. He is in continual search of happiness, which he does not attain. He comes in contact with the great spirits of the age, Lessing, Mendelssohn, and their group, yet does not find his way. He decides to travel and visit many cities and countries, but he meets with discrimination against the Jews in its brutal nakedness, and humiliated and broken in spirit and body he returns to the city of his birth to spend his last days in the circle of his family. Still even there he finds no rest, for Ephraim is a Jew and wants to remain one, while his brothers and sisters, with the exception of one, are Christians. Finally the struggle ends in insanity and death.

The portrayal of the tragic life of Ephraim, which was probably meant by the author as a protest against the miserable lot of the Jews at the time, is done with skill, and the character of the poet and merchant is delineated with considerable insight, but Ephraim is not the only character in the story. There are many others, his brothers, his sister, Feilchen, who has an infelicitous love affair with Lessing but ultimately marries a rich Jewish merchant as a matter of expediency, Lessing himself, and Mendelssohn and his group, among whom is also Solomon Maimon. All these characters are drawn in a more or less cursory manner, yet in their totality, they give a fair, though far from complete, picture of the early period of enlightenment among the Jews in Germany. The story also contains many semi-philosophical discussions about ideals of human life, about the nature of religion, Judaism, Christianity and similar subjects. In all these discussions the views of the author are reflected to a very great degree and they are animated with a spirit of love, truth, liberty, and humanitarianism.

The style of Auerbach's Jewish novels is distinguished by its Biblical phraseology. This influence is evident also in his German stories, but in a lesser degree. *Poet and Merchant* was translated into Hebrew by David Frishman (Sec. 7) under the title *Ephraim Kuh*.

iii. Another German Jewish novelist, one who drew his themes more from Jewish than German life, though he also portrayed the latter with considerable success, was Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904). The Jewish life he portrayed was that of the Galician, Podolian, and Rumanian ghettos. It was the one he knew best, for he was born in a Russian village near the Austrian border and spent his early youth in Czortkow, seat of the famous Hassidic Rabbis, and his adolescent years in Czernowitz, Bukowina, where he studied at the local gymnasium. However, in spite of his having lived in the midst of a typical Jewish environment, his Jewish consciousness during his younger years was less intense than that of Auerbach, for his father who was an Austrian district physician and a patriotic German impressed upon him his German nationality and often reminded him that he was by nationality a German and only a Jew by religious profession. In his childhood he was kept aloof from the Hassidic children and in general came in touch with the life of the ghetto very little for he attended neither the Hebrew school nor the synagogue. He did receive though some Jewish education from a private teacher. It was only during his student days at the gymnasium in Czernowitz that he came in close contact with the Jews of that city and observed their life. Yet notwithstanding his comparative coolness towards Jews and Judaism he withstood the temptation offered him on two occasions to forsake his religion. He distinguished himself at the gymnasium as a student of the classical languages and decided to become a professor, but the stipend which he needed in order to continue his studies was offered only on condition of conversion and young Karl Emil refused to fulfil the condition. Thus, frustrated in his career he turned to law, but again he met an obstacle for he strove to become a judge as he disliked the practice of law and conversion was also a necessary condition for this position. He therefore turned to journalism and literature.

When Franzos began his literary career, he utilized his childhood memories to great advantage and his first stories pictured Jewish life in East-Galicia. After traveling for a time extensively through the south of Russia, the Balkans and Turkey, he published a collection of short stories under the title, *Aus Halb-Asien*, portraying episodes of

general and Jewish life in these countries. This was followed in 1880 by *Die Juden von Barnow*—Barnow being the pseudonym for Czortkow—a collection of short stories of Hassidic life. He later turned to novels dealing with both general and Jewish life. The more important among the latter are *Moshkha von Parma* (1880), *Judith Trachtenberg* (1890), and *Der Poyaz* (1905, posthumous).

In his shorter stories, Franzos aimed merely to give miniature portraits of ghetto life in as objective a manner as possible. But since there is hardly any complete objectivity his subjective views cropped out in numerous places, and as a result, his stories are tinged with a reflection of his desire to enlighten and to modernize Jewish life and bring it more closely in harmony with the general life, the very same tendency that we meet with in many Hebrew and Yiddish writers of the period of enlightenment. But the *Maskilim*, saturated with the Jewish spirit, could not with all their criticism eradicate from their hearts the love and reverence for the old traditions. They also sensed the poetry of the ghetto life and sought to portray its finer side. This was not the case with Franzos, as he himself admits, in his preface to *Der Poyaz*. While he was not unmindful of the poetic aspects of Hassidic life, its charm escaped him, for it was strange to him even in his childhood. He, therefore, saw only the external side of Galician ghetto life, and consequently, many of his stories present its episodes in a comic light, and only a number touch upon the more serious and tragic phases of that life. No wonder then that some of his earlier stories aroused the ire and protests of traditional Jews and that he later found it necessary to apologize for them and explain his good intentions.

He partly atoned for his earlier light attitude towards ghetto life in his novels, especially in *Judith Trachtenberg* and *Der Poyaz*. The theme of the former is one frequently employed by Jewish novelists, a love affair between a Jewish girl and a non-Jew which results in the girl's forsaking her people and faith and ends in tragedy. The story takes place in a small town in Galicia. Judith and her brother, Raphael, children of Nathaniel Trachtenberg, a liberal Jewish merchant but an observant Jew, receive a modern education. This creates a rift between them and the Jewish youth of the town, and they, therefore, mingle in the society of Gentiles of the upper class. Their experiences in that society are not the same. Raphael is repulsed by the young nobles and is thereupon strengthened in his Jewish feeling, while Judith, on account of her beauty, is favored by the scions of Polish nobility. She

is warned by her brother but she disregards the warning and frequents that society. Ultimately, she meets the young Count Baranowski, and the acquaintance ripens into love. Judith follows her lover and insists on his marrying her. The Count hesitates to comply with her request on account of family pride, and resorts to a ruse. He has the ceremony performed by a layman who poses as a priest and who also attends to the conversion. Nathaniel dies of a broken heart, but the daughter is unaware of his death. When the truth is ultimately discovered by Judith during her sojourn in Italy, she leaves the Count and returns to her native town and falls ill. The Count pleads with her and she finally returns on condition that he marry her officially and that she remain a Jewess. They go to Germany for that purpose where such marriages were permitted and she returns to her native town as Countess Baranowski. Her conscience though is not set at rest by her triumph, and soon after her return she commits suicide and is buried in the Jewish cemetery.

The story is told with much pathos and the tragedy is projected in strong colors. The center of gravity of Judith's tragedy is, however, not remorse at deserting her people and religion, but grief and indignation at the loss of honor caused by the ruse of the Count. The triumph she sought to achieve was the restoration of that honor, and her insistence on remaining a Jewess was more an act of revenge than one of loyalty to the religion which she had betrayed. This reflects, to a degree, the view of Franzos himself who refused to convert himself because he considered it dishonorable to sell his religion for a mess of pottage. His purpose in this novel was to vindicate the sense of honor of the Jew rather than his devotion to his religion.

Der Poyaz is of a higher calibre and can be considered the best of all his works. In fact, he himself considered it so. In this novel, Franzos aimed to give a complete and embrative picture of the life of the Galician ghetto as it was lived in the fifties of the last century, and in a measure succeeded. I say in a measure advisedly, for even in this story only the external life is drawn on a wider canvas, while the inner phase still remained a closed book to the author. The value of the work, however, does not lie primarily in the breadth of the canvas, though it is important, nor even, as the writer himself makes us believe, in its humorous tone, but in the experiences of the principal character, Sender Glattlis or Curlander, surnamed the *Poyaz* (The Clown). In this novel, the writer, who was no lover of the ghetto, paid his debt to it by

presenting several of its types in a favorable light, especially the hero and his struggle for an ideal and for the expression of his soul. Sender is one of the dreamers of the ghetto and his struggle is one of its tragedies, but it is a tragedy that also reveals the nobility of spirit that underlay the unattractive exterior of the ghetto. The gist of the story is as follows: Sender, whose father was Mendel Kowner, a gifted itinerant beggar, is orphaned of both his parents in his infancy and is brought up by a poor Jewish woman who had promised his mother on her death bed to take care of the child. This promise she keeps faithfully at all costs. The child is of a turbulent nature as he had inherited from his father an inclination to restlessness as well as an ability for mimicry which earns him the name *Poyaz*. Both inclinations cause a lot of trouble to his foster mother and to Sender himself. He arouses the ire of his teachers and many others whom he mimics. He changes trades and masters, and for a time becomes a driver of a stage-coach, until on one of his journeys to Czernowitz he chances to visit the theatre and suddenly becomes conscious of his destiny. He decides to become an actor. He presents himself to the director, a kindly man, who recognizes his native talent and encourages him in his aspirations but advises him to return to his home to study German for two years and then come back to him.

Nadler, the director, becomes the ideal of Sender who heeds his advice, gives up his job as driver, apprentices himself to a watchmaker, and applies himself to the study of German. Here, however, his tribulations begin. The study of German is forbidden in the ghetto. There are no teachers and he is poor, but study he must for that will lead to the most sacred goal of his life—to become an artist. The obstacles are almost insurmountable, but with remarkable obstinacy he endures all suffering to obtain knowledge of the coveted German. He secretly visits a forsaken library in the monastery of the city where in the bitter cold of the Podolian winter—the library is not heated—he struggles for months with the dramas of Lessing and finally masters the rudiments of the German language. During his visits to the library he contracts tuberculosis, but he struggles on with disease, poverty, and other adversities towards his aim. Finally, he receives an invitation from Nadler to come to Czernowitz and he leaves his home secretly on a stormy night. This adventure brings him nearer to his goal but not to the goal itself, for he is detained by the flood of the Dniester in a town near Czernowitz. There he has a chance to appear in the role of

Shylock at a rehearsal of a troupe of actors. His talent is recognized, but his old ailment, aggravated by the cold of that stormy night, takes hold of him and he succumbs, never realizing his life's ambition. Not less ideal is the type of Rosel, his foster mother, who makes all sacrifices in order to keep her promise to Sender's mother. Her heroic struggles to protect her foster child represent the deepest expression of the love of the Jewish mother. To these must be added the ideal type of Itzig Turkeschill, the match-maker, who though disappointed in Sender numerous times as he refuses the matches he proposes, stands by him in all his tribulations. Itzig's sense of humor, his honesty, and his love for humanity save him from the fanaticism of his environment and attach him to Sender whom he both pities and loves. The story of these three types reveals to us, probably without the intention of the author, the inner spirit of the ghetto life which produced such ideal personalities.

iv. A writer whose literary ability expressed itself almost exclusively in his novels and short stories of ghetto life was Leopold Kompert (1822-1886). He was really the father of the ghetto novel and story in German Jewish literature and, as we have seen, found many imitators. As he hailed from Bohemia, it was the Bohemian and Moravian Jewish life which he portrayed. Among his works are *Böhmische Juden* (Bohemian Jews); *Neue Geschichten aus dem Ghetto* (New Ghetto Stories); *An dem Pflug* (At the Plow); *Geschichte einer Gasse* (The Story of a Street), and others. The first two are collections of short stories and sketches, the last two novels. Kompert, who himself lived a Jewish life and whose interest in Jews and Judaism was deep, presented the ghetto life with sympathy and love, and with a knowledge of its conditions, manners, and customs, bringing out its inner spirit. The themes of his stories and novels are drawn both from the static and dynamic phases of Jewish life, namely, from the ghetto before it was touched by the modern spirit as well as from the ghetto split by the struggle between the old and the new ways of life. *An dem Pflug*, one of his better novels, deals with just such a theme, namely the adjustment of Jewish life to new conditions. It is the story of events in the life of the family of Solomon Hohn of Prague in its acclimatization to conditions in a Bohemian village. The new laws issued in 1850 by Franz Josef which allowed Jews to own land stirred many to forsake the large cities and become farmers. Among them was Solomon Hohn. His wife opposed the change as she could not bear the idea of separating

herself from the Jewish community and its mode of living. She therefore followed her husband unwillingly. This caused friction and made the adjustment to the new life more difficult. The story of the orientation is told with skill and talent, but is interspersed with too many dialogues which take the place of action.

Kompert's stories were translated into several European languages, the *An dem Pflug* also being rendered into Hebrew under the title *le-Yad ha-Mahresho*.

80. SHORT STORIES FROM GHETTO LIFE, FOLK LORE, AND HISTORICAL NOVELS

Besides the above-mentioned writers who divided their literary talents in portrayal of life between the general and the Jewish, there were a host of others who drew exclusively upon Jewish life, both of the ghetto and of the distant past for their short stories and novels. The totality of their productions form a valuable contribution to Jewish literature.

The leading writers of this group were Aaron Bernstein (1812-1884), Solomon Kohn (1825-1904), Nathan Samuely (Sec. 13), Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889), Meyer Lehmann (1831-1890), J. A. Francolm (1788-1849), Moses Wasserman (1811-1842), and M. Friedlander. The first three portrayed the ghetto life either as it was lived in the German-Polish provinces before the emancipation, or in Bohemia even as late as the middle of the last century, or in Galicia even later.

i. A. Bernstein pictured Polish ghetto life in its integrity before it was touched by the modern spirit in his two short novels, *Vögele der Maggid* (Vögele the Preacher) and *Mendel Gibbor* (Mendel the Strong Man). In the first the theme is the idyllic love affair between two *Yeshibah Bahurim* and the daughters of the lessee of the community *Mikweh* (The Ritual Bath House), Hayyim Mikwenizer, whose oldest daughter, Vögele, was surnamed *der Maggid* on account of her brilliant speech which she interspersed with quotations from the Bible and the Talmud. The portrayal of the characteristic features of the Jewish life in a small town forms the background of the story which ends with the lovers forsaking the *Yeshibah*, going to a large city to acquire a secular education and returning to the town to marry their loved ones. The principal character of the second story, Mendel, is not a student but a man of the people, a travelling peddler, as were most of the Jews of the town and his struggles and vicissitudes are told in detail and with sympathy. An important feature of both novels is the presentation of

the nobility and goodness of the typical Jewish women of older days, as reflected in the lives and actions of the characters in the stories.

ii. Solomon Kohn was a prolific short story writer and novelist. His themes are drawn mainly from Jewish life as it was reflected in the ghetto of Prague during the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. He also utilized the legends and folk tales current in that age-old ghetto for a number of his stories. His numerous stories appeared in all German-Jewish periodicals for years and were collected in 1877 into several volumes under the titles *Prager Ghettobilder* and *Neue Ghettobilder* (Portraits of the Prague Ghetto and New Ghetto Portraits).

iii. Samuely devoted himself to presenting an objective picture of contemporary Jewish life in Galicia, especially in the smaller towns. The struggle between the old traditional Jewish life and the modern spirit which penetrated even into the smaller towns and influenced the younger generation of Jews afforded him many a theme for his sketches, both humorous and tragic. Samuely's stories were collected in two volumes bearing the titles *Kulturbilder* (Cultural Portraits) and *Zwischen Licht und Schatten* (Between Light and Shadows).

iv. Other writers, who depicted the various phases of Jewish life in the ghetto in sketches and novels were Michael Klapp (1832-1888) whose novel, *Zweierlei Juden* (Two Kinds of Jews) and collection of sketches, *Komische Geschichten aus dem jüdischen Volksleben* (Comic Stories from Jewish Folklife) were popular at the time among Bohemian Jews; Eduard Kulke (1831-1897) whose collection of stories, *Geschichten* appeared in 1869; Leo Herzberg Frankel who produced a volume of stories entitled *Polnische Juden* (Polish Jews); and Alexander Weil whose sketches of Alsatian Jewish life form a special contribution to Jewish belles-lettres.

v. The rich folklore of the German and Austrian ghettos was partially utilized by writers of fiction, and many stories based on legends and tales were included in volumes published successively for several years by Wolf Pescheles under the Hebrew title *Sippurim* (Stories). These volumes are a veritable storehouse of the lore of the Jewish masses and reflect their piety and their ethical bent. We will select one of such stories as a typical example of the general nature of this lore.

The story is called *Der Kamẓan* (Parsimonious Man) and runs as follows: Once there lived a rich Jew who was very pious but was sparing with his money and made only meager contributions to charity.

He was a *Mohel* (one who performs the rite of circumcision), but charged only the rich for his services and not the poor, considering this a form of charity. On a certain afternoon a richly equipped carriage drew up at his door and a well-dressed man alighted and invited the *Mohel* to his house to perform the rite of circumcision. Expecting a large reward, the *Kamẓan* consented and went with the man. Out of town the carriage turned from the road and was driven with unusual speed through wild places until it finally stopped at a palace situated in the midst of a desolate looking country. On entering the palace, the *Mohel* was taken to see the newly-born infant and its mother. There she disclosed to him that she is married to a demon who owns the palace and warned the *Mohel* not to taste any food or drink nor accept any present lest he fall into the power of the spirits. The rite was performed and a sumptuous table spread, but the *Mohel* refused to taste anything in spite of pleadings. The father of the child then took him into a room, the walls and ceiling of which were of silver and was also full of silver coins and bade him take as much as his heart desired, but the *Mohel* heeding the warning restrained himself in spite of his greed. The same experiment was repeated in rooms of gold and precious jewels which made the *Kamẓan's* efforts at conquering his lust for money more trying, but he succeeded. Finally, he was conducted through a room full of keys among which he recognized his own key to his coffers. The following explanation was then offered by the demon. When a man amasses riches, an invisible key to his chests is made by heavenly powers. If he uses his wealth properly, the key is kept in heaven, if not, it is turned over to the demons who keep the treasures locked so that even the owner himself is unable to open them and has no power over his money even for his own use. "Now," said the demon, "since you displayed such restraint, I hereby return your key to your coffers; return home and use your riches in the proper manner by sharing it with the poor." The *Mohel* was then brought home in safety.

vi. Of the writers of historical fiction, the leading places belong to Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889) and Meyer Lehmann (d. 1890). Both were Rabbis, the former a leader of the Reform movement, and the latter a champion of Orthodoxy both of whom made good use of their knowledge of Jewish history. Philippson, who was the founder in 1837 of the most important of all German Jewish periodicals, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, and served as its editor until his

death, published numerous historical short stories in his weekly which were collected in 1843 in several volumes under the title *Saron*. Another collection of historical stories appeared in 1872 entitled *An den Strömen durch drei Jahrtausende* (On the Streams of Three Thousand Years of History). Of his novels, the most important are *Sepphoris und Rom* and *Jacob Tirado*. The first deals with the life in Palestine in the second century with Judah the Prince, the redactor of the Mishnah, as its principal character. The second relates the story of the settlement of the Jews in the Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century. Not only are the life and activities of Tirado, the brave leader of the first group of settlers, portrayed with vividness and historical accuracy, but the environment too is drawn with great skill and in an artistic manner. Many of Philipppson's stories were translated into other languages, and most of them were done into Hebrew. *Jacob Tirado* was especially popular with Jewish readers in many lands.

Lehmann, like Philipppson, was the editor of a weekly, the *Israelit* which he established at Mayence in 1860. For many years he printed his stories and novels in the periodical and at a later date he published them separately. The most important of these are *Rabbi Joselman von Rossheim* which is the story of the life of an outstanding personality of German Jewry during the sixteenth century who represented his brethren before kings and princes; *Bustanai*, a tale about the Babylonian Exilarch by that name, a friend of Ali, the Arabian conqueror of Babylonia; *Gershom die Leuchte der Zerstreuten* (Gershom the Light of the Exile), which narrates some episodes in the life of this distinguished scholar with many legendary and romantic embellishments; *Süss Oppenheim*, relating the tragedy of the seventeenth century financial agent of princes who later became the hero of Feuchtwanger's novel, *Power*; and *Akiba*, a dramatic and much embellished tale of the life of this great personality. Lehmann was endowed with a fertile imagination which could expand the meager historical data into a well constructed and unified story or novel which is read with interest. His stories are permeated with a strong spirit of loyalty and devotion to Jewish tradition. Almost all his works were translated into Hebrew and also into English.

J. A. Francolm wrote a novel under the name *Die Kreuzfahrer in England unter Richard Löwenherz* (The Crusaders in England under Richard Coeur de Lion) which portrays in a colorful manner the per-

secution of the Jews of York and their struggle with the Crusaders at that time. He also wrote several other stories of a semi-historical character. Moses Wasserman distinguished himself with his novel, *Die Mädchen von Chaibar*, depicting Jewish life in Arabia at the time of Mohammed and the struggle of the free Jews with the militant prophet. The work is written with historical insight and with vivid imagination. His second novel, *Juda Turo*, centers around the life and deeds of the American Jewish financier and philanthropist. Moritz Friedländer's novel, *Apion*, deals with Jewish life in Egypt during the first century of the Common Era. The leading characters are Philo, Agrippa, later king of Judea, and Apion, one of the earliest literary Jew-baiters. The events of the time are portrayed with skill and with fine imaginative embellishments.

An interesting historical novel is Solomon Kohn's *Fürstengunst* (The Princes' Favor) in which the famous court agent in the eighteenth century, Samson Wertheimer, is the principal character. The life, manner and court intrigues of the period are depicted with mastery and impart special value to the work.

The novels of Francolm, Wasserman, and Friedlander were, like those of Philippson and Lehmann, translated into Hebrew. In general it can be said that modern Hebrew literature, which during the nineteenth century produced hardly any original historical novels with the exception of the two by Mapu (Vol. III, Sec. 43), drew upon contemporary German Jewish literature for a supply of historical fiction for its readers which they, as real children of the ghetto saturated with the Jewish spirit, appreciated at its true value.

81. THE YOUNGER WRITERS (MAX BROD, ARNOLD ZWEIG AND OTHERS)

The writers hitherto considered and the literature they produced belong primarily to the nineteenth century during which the struggle for emancipation as well as the brief enjoyment of the coveted equality took place. The aim of the German Jewish belles-lettres was mostly, as we have seen, to arouse respect and love for the Jewish past, and thus to inculcate in the hearts of the readers devotion to Judaism which was being constantly threatened by the spirit of assimilation. At times, as in the case of Franzos, the purpose was to portray the narrowness of ghetto life in order to influence the German reading East-European Jews to widen their horizon.

At the turn of the century, the situation changed. On the one hand, the spirit of conscious assimilation slackened because of the rise of anti-Semitism, and on the other hand, the Jewish renaissance movement began to affect the Jewries of Germany and Austria. A small but highly intellectual group of young Jews directed that renaissance and their efforts bore fruit. A deep interest in Judaism spread among the young generation and a desire for deeper Jewish knowledge arose. The desire was catered to by the development of a new literature. Martin Buber (1878), one of the leaders of that renaissance, revived interest in Hāssidism around which he spread a halo of romanticism. He was followed in his endeavors by many writers, some of whom worked in different fields of Jewish letters, while others produced belletristic works imbued with the spirit of the renaissance. Thus, there arose a generation of writers who not only portrayed Jewish life in a deeper and wider manner, but also endeavored to deal in their stories and novels with fundamental Jewish problems. This tendency became more prevalent during and after the World War when Jewish life in the larger part of Europe assumed a gloomy aspect. As a result, we have a number of novels written by men who had also made a name for themselves in general German literature in which the fate, destiny, and tragedy of Israel are presented in a poetic and philosophic manner. One of the ablest of these writers is Max Brod (1884).

i. Brod distinguished himself in many literary fields, as a novelist, dramatist, lyric poet, and also as a thinker. In the many novels he wrote he always sought to unfold some deeper thoughts upon problems affecting the life and destiny of man. A number of his stories portray various phases of general life, especially that of his native country, Bohemia, but several of them are devoted to aspects of Jewish life. These are the following: *Jüdinnen* (Jewesses), *Reubeni*, and *Die Frau die nicht enttäuscht* (The Woman Who Does Not Disappoint). The first, however, is distinguished neither by its content nor its form. It is primarily a gallery of portraits of women set against a background of Jewish life in a provincial Bohemian town, Teplitz, a health and summer resort. The main ideal of these women, who are unmarried, is the acquisition of a husband, and in order to attain the coveted aim, they resort to all kinds of stratagems, even some which are not entirely ethical. One of these stratagems employed by an elderly girl is the chief motive of the novel. The strong passion for family life is a feature of the Jewish character, but when this otherwise noble passion assumes

the form of husband hunting conducted without regard to rule or limit it becomes an unaesthetic trait; it is in this light that it is pictured by Brod. Besides these portraits of women, there are also several pictures of men, including that of a young Jew who looks down upon his own people, glories in his Germanic culture, and is devoted to spreading it in a Slavonic country.

Jüddinnen is a product of Brod's earlier literary efforts before his genius was developed to its full capacity, and before he began to concern himself with the profounder aspects of life. The World War, in which Brod participated, and the misery it brought especially in Jewish life, led him to different paths of thinking. In the days after the War, he was captivated by the Zionist ideal and became active in the movement and even served for a time as vice-president of the Jewish National Council in Czecho-Slovakia. These activities and interests called forth in him reflections upon the problems of life and the destiny of nations, especially that of his own people. One of the problems which occupied him at the time was that of sin, not from a theological aspect but from a human and moral point of view. Probably influenced by some of Nietzsche's theories, and also by some Kabbalistic statements and fragments of doctrines which filtered into intellectual Jewish circles through the neo-Hassidic literature and were made popular by Buber and his followers, he came to the conclusion that sin is a necessary element in the life of man in his struggle toward the good. He unfolds his ideas on the subject in a masterly novel, *Reubeni*, the hero of which is the famous historical character, David Reubeni (Vol. II, Sec. 138). Reubeni (1490-1537) is one of the most mysterious and interesting personalities in Jewish history. He appeared suddenly in the year 1524 in Europe and declared that he was an ambassador of King Joseph, ruler of a Jewish kingdom in Arabia who was his brother, and that he had been sent on a political mission to some of the Christian princes of Europe. He claimed that the inhabitants of his kingdom belonged to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Menasseh, but that the royal dynasty belonged to the first-named tribe, hence his name Reubeni. He was at first successful in his endeavors; his plans were favorably viewed by the Pope, Clemens VII, and he was recommended by the latter to the King of Portugal who was about to conclude a political and military alliance with David. These favors emboldened the Marranos to espouse Judaism more publicly, and one of them, a brilliant officer of the state, Diogo Pires, not only became a Jew but

under the name of Solomon Molko began to preach Messianism. This frustrated Reubeni's plans, and after many adventures in which his path crossed that of Molko, the two met before Charles the Fifth at Augsburg, who arrested them. Molko was burned at the stake and Reubeni died in prison. Sober history has thus far been unable to solve the riddle which this peculiar personality presents. It is taken for granted that he came from the Orient, but we do not know whether he was a shrewd adventurer who relied upon the credulity of the people at the time or a dreamer and visionary who deluded himself and misled others. Brod undertakes to solve the mystery in his novel, though that is not his main purpose. For this reason he invents a purely imaginary biography of David up to the time of his appearance as an ambassador, and makes him a child of the Prague ghetto. The tale of his early life which is supposed to furnish the key to his personality forms the theme of the first part of the novel.

The story opens with an episode in the life of the child, David, the son of a very pious father, Simon Laemil, at the age of ten. He ponders over a Mishnaic statement, which referring to the verse in Deut. VI, 5, "And thou shalt love thy Lord, thy God, with all thy heart," says, "This means thou shalt worship Him with both thy good and evil impulses." How, reflected the child, can a man worship God with evil impulse? This problem does not let him rest. He resorts to the company of a certain teacher who is looked askance upon by the community because of his humanistic studies and learns from him about the life and achievements of other nations, as well as about the persecutions of the Jews in former ages, but the problem is not solved, it is only aggravated. David, then, moved by the heroism of other nations, begins to aspire to heroic deeds and deplors the weakness of the Jews. These thoughts lead him to another problem: Why are the other nations, though sinful, dominant, and why are the Jews who strive to do good in a most miserable state? He is further troubled by the fact that sin penetrates perforce to the Jews too in their commercial transactions. He begins to rebel against the fate of the exile. He reveals some of his thoughts to his father but is sternly rebuked, and thus he begins to sense a rift between himself and the ghetto. The older David grows, the more perplexed he becomes. Soon he himself becomes acquainted with sin. On a mission to the city outside the ghetto, he meets Monica, a Christian girl, the daughter of a blacksmith, who entangles him in the meshes of love.

David, now eighteen, at first hesitates, but gradually his visits to her grow more frequent. He is impressed by the more beautiful aspect of life outside of the ghetto, by the courage and stability of the character of Monica and contrasts it with the narrowness, fear, and insecurity of life in the ghetto and the gap between him and his Jewish environment widens still more. A thought enters his mind that perhaps the Jews sin too little and perhaps it is better to be the attacker than be attacked. Through force of circumstances these thoughts gradually form in his mind into a theory. His relations with Monica grow more sinful; he visits her nightly. These visits require trips outside the ghetto walls and he becomes acquainted with Gerson, the watchman of the gates, a queer person. It turns out that this Gerson is none other than the former false Messiah, Asher Lämmlein, and this half-insane mystic in his vagaries talks in none too clear sentences of the Kabbalistic doctrines which look upon sin as an important element in the universe and as a means of ultimate good. He also encourages David to believe that he will finish what Asher failed to do. We thus see here the inception of the later career of Reubeni. David, however, is no mystic; he thinks of his people and wants to redeem them in his own way, by strength and power which can come only through sin. Sin envelops him and there is no escape, especially since Monica saves the Jews from exile from Prague through her relation with the governor of the province. He himself sinks deeper into sin and elopes with Monica, but after many adventures she forsakes him for a soldier in the king's army who displays prowess and strength in saving her from drowning in an inundation. Thus the first part ends.

The second part begins with Reubeni's arrival in Italy after an interval of fourteen years. It relates, and with a degree of historical correctness, the adventures of the transformed David, but does not tell how the transformation was accomplished. After his stay in Italy where he meets the humanists of the day, among them Machiavelli, his belief in the theory that sin may be committed for the sake of good, is strengthened. He feels fully justified in his assumed role of ambassador and military leader. In Portugal, though, after meeting with Molko, and encountering obstacles to his plan, his doubts increase. Interesting are his relations with Molko. At first he repels him, seeing in him the greatest obstacle to his plan; in fact, he considers his mysticism a danger, yet he is drawn to him by his remarkable personality and complete innocence. David's plans are frustrated; he has to leave

Portugal and after many adventures he arrives in Italy, poor and forsaken. Molko comes there too, surrounded by the halo of Messianism and they meet again. Reubeni's doubts increase and he thinks that perhaps Molko is the redeemer and not he. Even in his prison at Augsburg when his end approaches, he still says, "My way was right, but I was weak." Thus ends the second part.

The story is, as said, told with masterly skill and possesses deep human interest. Yet, it solves neither of the problems; neither that of the role of sin nor the riddle of Reubeni. The first part only furnishes a hint to the explanation of the riddle and makes David out as an adventurer who invented a most fantastic plan for saving his people. We do not see the gradual transformation of the character of Reubeni from the vascillating youth torn by conflicting emotions into the powerful, shrewd, and scheming warrior. There is a great hiatus between the two periods in the life of David with only slender threads thrown across the gap; still the main problem is skillfully developed even if it is not solved.

A problem of a different calibre and of more practical value to the Jews is dealt with in the novel, *Die Frau die nicht enttauscht*, written in 1932, when the wave of Jew hatred began to rise in Germanic countries. The problem is the precarious position of the modern intellectual Jew, who is not only saturated with the culture of the country in which he lives, but loves it and enriches it with his own productions. The principal character is Justus Spira, writer and poet, who had made a reputation in German literature. Theoretically he is a conscientious Jew and is even friendly to the Zionist movement, but in practical life he is thoroughly assimilated and is therefore severely shocked by the events of the early thirties. He is depressed by the fact that he is suddenly excluded from participating in German cultural life although he has given expression to its spirit in his poems and novels and he endeavors to find a *modus vivendi* in this changed world. His struggle with this problem is drawn against the background of his love life. Spira is disappointed in his love of a married woman, Sybil Behemend of Vienna, and goes to a sanitarium in the Sudetenland for a rest. There he meets a beautiful young woman, also married, Carola Weber, who is estranged from her husband. The disparity in age and race, at first formidable obstacles, gradually seem to disappear and a love entanglement between the two begins. Spira, constantly conscious of the peculiar position of the Jewish intellectual, reflects on the an-

tagonism between Jew and Aryan. He evolves a theory which suggests to him a solution of his personal love problem. He decides upon *distanzliebe*, i.e. detached love. This love he interprets as devotion to a person or a culture which must never be fully realized. There must always be a restraint and distance between the lover and beloved. The theory does not work. He and Carola draw closer to each other and for a time live together. This situation, however, ends in tragedy for Spira. Ultimately Carola leaves him, and after divorcing her husband marries a German, a member of Spira's publishing firm. He is, in spite of his theory, desperate. Then he turns to Zionism and is enraptured by a plan of the Workers' Foundation in Palestine to establish a school for Arab children. He finds in the Palestinian ideal a remedy for the ills of the Jewish people, and thus this ideal seems to be "the woman who does not disappoint."

This novel, on the whole, has little action and much reflection, and much more emphasis is placed on Spira than on that of the other important character, Carola. We are not told why Carola fell in love with a man twice her age nor what attracted her to him. The fact is, however, that the presentation of the problem is more important to Brod than the solution or the unity of the story. Brod, in these novels, threw much light upon the complicated problems of Jewish life even if he did not offer any remedy for its ills, though as a Zionist, he points in the direction of that movement.

It is interesting to note that Brod still clings to his conception of "detached love" for he recommends it as late as the end of 1938 as a mode of conduct in regard to the participation of the Jews in the political life of the countries in which they reside. "Detached love," he says, "is a dialectic conception. It bears a contradiction in itself." "Yet," he continues, "life consists of nothing else but such contradictions which cannot be resolved by logic." His conclusion is that Jews must by no means abstain from participation in political affairs but that they must engage in it with detachment and reserve.*

ii. Of the novels and stories by other famous German Jewish writers which deal with Jewish life of the present or the past, we will single out Arnold Zweig's *De Vriendt Kehrt Heim* (De Vriendt Comes Home)—The novels of the other writers are too well known to the readers and need not be introduced.—In this novel, Zweig portrays Jewish life in Palestine during the memorable year 1929, when a series

* See his article, *A Dangerous Question*, Jewish Frontier, 1939.

of attacks and pogroms on the Jews were made by the Arabs. The principal character, De Vriendt, is none other than the notorious De Haan, leader of the ultra-orthodox faction, known as the Agudists, who had opposed for a number of years the aims of political Zionism, and had even been ready to join hands with the Arabs in their efforts to thwart the strivings of the Jewish Agency, when he was suddenly shot down by an unknown hand. De Haan, who was a brilliant jurist and writer of note, was a colorful personality. In spite of his secularism and modernity, he became, during the later part of his life, a zealous fanatic and, as said, a leader of the Palestinian ultra-orthodox faction whose education, mode of life and view differed greatly from his. It seems that even after his conversion he was not really pious and that he harbored a dualism in his soul. While his external conduct was impeachable, there were dark spots in his more personal life, and the rather free and impetuous thoughts which he harbored in his subconsciousness came to expression in a number of poems which were made public after his death. His murderer was never discovered and there was much speculation as to whether he was an Arab or a Jew.

It is this man, his life and activities during his residence in Jerusalem, and his death that Zweig chose to portray in a large part of his novel. His main purpose, however, was, as noted, to give a cross-section of Jewish life in Palestine in that year, and De Haan afforded him an opportunity for enlarging upon the scope of that life. In fact, De Haan was killed in 1923, six years earlier than the time at which Zweig dates his novel.

The Palestinian scene is depicted in detail and with much first-hand knowledge of the situation. Both the views of the various factions of Zionists and those of the Agudists are presented in clear outline, and the attitude of the English officials, the administrators of the country, towards both Arabs and Jews is correctly stated. There is fine description of various Palestinian landscapes as well as of the multi-colored life in that country but not much analysis of characters. Zweig attempts to solve the mystery of De Haan's personality, but he does not go deep enough. The value of the story lies primarily in the general portrayal of the manifold life in Palestine at the stated time.

iii. The interest in the nationalist idea and in the renaissance of Jewish culture in certain circles of the younger generation of Jews, also aroused them to an interest in the literary productions of the East-European Jews, especially those written in Hebrew and Yiddish.

There arose, as a result, an extensive literature of translations. Many of the stories of Perez, Mendele, Ash, and other leading Hebrew and Yiddish writers as well as the poems of Bialik and other Hebrew poets were rendered into German. Several writers, however, were not satisfied with mere translations, but strove to recast and elaborate in their own way a part of the folk literature of the ages. They sought particularly to reveal to the readers the spirit which permeates the mass of legends and stories that cluster about the lives of great men, saints, and episodes in Jewish history. Buber, who, as stated above, sensed the fruitful seed in Hassidism which was hidden beneath the husk of superstition and erratic mystic tendencies, devoted himself to the task of presenting to readers of German the legends and tales of the movement. In his works, *Die Legende des Ba'al Shem* and *Der grosse Maggid und seine Nachfolger*, he collected the best legends and tales which the popular mind had created about the lives and activities of these two outstanding figures of Hassidism and elaborated them skillfully in a poetic manner. In his third work, *Die Geschichte des Rabbi Nahman*, he recast and elaborated a number of the stories of the famous Hassidic leader, Rabbi Nahman of Brazlaw, as told by him orally to his followers and written down by his disciples. In all these works, Buber not only dressed the primitive folk material in a literary garb, but often also added a touch of his own which enhanced the value of the stories. In addition, his introduction to each of the collections not only describes the life and teachings of the founders of Hassidism but reveals the emotional glow and thoughts which the tales and legends embody.

Hayyim Bloch's *Der Golem* is of a different genre. It is a collection of legends and folk tales of the ghetto of Prague. It centers around the life of the famous Rabbi, Judah Löw (1513-1609), known as a great wonder worker, and especially about his creation of the homunculus (Golem). This Rabbi was distinguished by his great love for his brethren whom he saved from many a disaster by his sagacity and wisdom, and according to legend by the miraculous deeds performed through the *Golem*, which he was ordered from heaven to create for that purpose. The whole cycle of legends in which the Rabbi and the *Golem* play important parts is told by Bloch in a simple but effective manner. They are arranged in chronological order, beginning with the birth of Judah Löw and ending with his death.

Bloch wrote also a number of other tales taken from Ḥassidic lore, which were collected in several volumes: a volume of anecdotes representing types of East-European Jewish humor, entitled *Ost-jüdischer Humor*, and *Die Gemeinde der Chassidim*, an essay on the rise and theories, manners, and customs of the Ḥassidic sect.

A work of greater extent and of different calibre is *Der Born Judas* (The Fountain of Judah) by M. J. Bin Gorion, the pseudonym of Micah Joseph Berdichewski, the well known Hebrew essayist and short story writer (Sec. 16). The purpose of the author was to collect all stories, tales, and legends created by the folk-mind or recast by it during the period beginning with the close of the Talmud to the rise of the Ḥassidic movement. He relates all kinds of stories and episodes in the lives of saints or scholars, miscellaneous events in the history of the nation and tales which have a didactic purpose or a mystical trend. The work is arranged in two series, each of which contains a number of parts. In the first series, there are grouped tales, stories, and legends around episodes which display the finest traits of character or acts of martyrdom, or saintliness, or edification in the lives of the great of antiquity and of the Mediaeval period. The second series contains much legendary material and folk stories about the Holy Land, spirits, demons, episodes of the lives of later pious men, and Ḥassidic tales. Many of these tales and legends are also found in the Talmud but they are here reproduced in the form which they had assumed in later literature. Bin Gorion in this work attempted to reveal certain phases of the Jewish soul as they were reflected in the legends created during the most trying periods of the history of the people.

82. POETRY

In the field of poetry, German Jewish literature was as productive as it was in the realm of fiction, and possibly even more so. As poetry precedes prose in all literatures, so it did in this particular branch of literary expression. As early as 1771, Issachar Behr Falkenson (b. 1746) published a volume of poems entitled *Gedichte eines polnischen Juden* (Poems by a Polish Jew) which had impressed the literary world of the time to such a degree that the great Goethe found it necessary to review the volume. He was followed by a long line of poets, each of whom expressed his feelings about Jews and Judaism with more or less poetic glow.

i. The more important of these were L. Steinheim (Vol. III, Sec. 97), Joel Jacoby (1807), and Ludwig August Frankel (Vol. III, Sec. 92). The first, who is known to us as a philosopher, produced his long epic poem, *Sinai*, in 1823, under the assumed name of Obadiah ben Amos, he himself figuring merely as the publisher. The epic tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and concludes with the revelation at Sinai. Steinheim was influenced in the composition of this work by Klopstock's *Messiade* and possibly by Wessely's Hebrew epic, *Shiré Tiferet* (Vol. III, Sec. 18) published twenty years earlier, which deals with the same theme. But while Wessely, on the whole, follows the Biblical narrative, and merely relates the story in verse, only occasionally adding a poetic touch of his own, Steinheim dramatizes the story and often deviates from the narrative and makes the redemption from Egypt an event not only in the history of Israel but in that of the human genus as a whole. In this poem there are already found the seeds of his later philosophy which, as stated in the preceding volume (Sec. 97), asserts that the principles of faith were really revealed by God, and made a part of human spiritual experience independent of reason. The revelation at Sinai was meant not only for the Jews but for humanity as a whole and the Jews were chosen merely as an instrument. The redemption from Egypt which was preparatory to that revelation was therefore the redemption of man from error and subjection to passion and misleading ideas. This idea is the fundamental motive of the long epic. The epic is divided into five books, each of which contains five cantos. The first canto describes the redemption of Israel from Egypt as a subject of struggle between God and Satan. Satan, after hearing the declaration by the angel Elaho that the Almighty is about to redeem Israel and reveal to them the way to a higher life, makes a counterdeclaration that the redemption of man which is to result from that act shall never be carried out fully, and that he will exert his efforts to prevent its accomplishment. He mobilizes his evil forces and sends his assistants to Egypt to place as many obstacles as possible in the way. This motive plays an important part in the other cantos of the epic. The complaints of the Jews against Moses, the performance of miracles by the magicians of Egypt, the rebellions of the Jews on their journey through the desert, the making of the golden calf—all these are represented as the machination of the assistants of Satan in their efforts to check the process of

redemption of man. The struggle motive adds much poetic zest to the work and affords room for numerous dramatic scenes and episodes. The epic reads with interest, though it does not always rise to poetic heights.

Five years later, in 1829, Steinheim produced his *Gesänge aus der Verbannung* (Songs of Exile), under the same pseudonym, Obadiah ben Amos. The poems were supposed to have been written by Obadiah who lived in Egypt at the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.E.). In these poems which are more of a didactic than of a lyric nature, the poet-philosopher proclaims his views on the destiny of the Jewish people. The exile, he says, was predestined in order that Israel might teach the peoples of the world the right way of faith and life. The Jew was equally destined to suffer but final victory will be his. On the whole, the collection, though it was aimed to impress the young with the loftiness of the Jewish mission, possesses little of the genuine and exalted spirit which pervades the epic *Sinai*, yet, probably due to the brevity of the poems, it was more popular than the former and went through a second edition in 1837.

Joel Jacoby's (b. 1807) collection of poems, *Klagen eines Juden* (Plaints of a Jew), was also published in 1837 and in their time made a great impression, for in them he expressed deep sorrow over the fate of his people, as well as a firm faith in the survival of Israel in spite of all persecutions. However, there crept into them a note of hypocrisy and flattery for the ruling faith which betrayed an insincerity on the part of the poet, which was corroborated by his conversion to Christianity immediately after the publication of the work.

Ludwig August Frankel was the most prolific and most gifted German Jewish poet. He sang both on general and Jewish themes and his fame as leading singer of his time was well established. The most important of his collections of Jewish songs are: *Sagen aus dem Morgenlande* (Legends of the Orient); *Rachel*; *Nach der Zerstörung* (After the Destruction); and *Tragische Könige* (Tragic Kings). The first is a collection of poems based on Oriental stories about Alexander, David, Solomon, and Moses, as well as legends about the creation of man and the destruction of the Temple. A number of these legends are taken from the Talmud and others from Arabic sources. The second is a long Biblical poem about Rachel; the third contains a large number of poems on the motives of Jewish suffering, hopes and aspira-

tions, and the fourth, poems of Biblical content. Frankel's songs are distinguished by their lyrical quality, exquisite style and swing of meter, deep pathos, and love for the Jewish people.

Other poets, who may be mentioned are Moritz Rappaport (1808-1880) who wrote an epic poem, *Mose*, in five cantos, and several other long didactic poems; Ludwig Philippson, who composed many lyrical and didactic poems; and Ludwig Wihl (1807-1882) whose collection of poems, *Westöstliche Schwalben*, greatly impressed his contemporaries and was translated into French by Mercier.

Of the many poets who devoted themselves exclusively to the poetic elaboration of Biblical and Midrashic themes, the most noted were Isidor Kalisch, whose collection of poems, *Tönen des Morgenlandes* (Voices from the Orient) was published in 1865 and Michael Sachs (Vol. III, Sec. 89) whose *Stimmen von Jordan und Euphrat*, poems based on Midrashic and Agadic sources, are permeated with a spirit of deep lyricism.

There were also numerous translators of the works of Mediaeval poets, the most distinguished among whom were L. Zunz (Vol. III, Sec. 73) who rendered into German many of the *Piyyutim* of Mediaeval singers and incorporated them in *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*; M. Sachs, who translated numerous selections of the Spanish poets in his work, *Die Religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien*; Abraham Geiger whose *Diwan des Castiliers Abul Hasan Jehudah ha-Levi* contains masterly translations of a number of poems of this gifted singer; and David Rosen whose *Reime und Gedichte des Abraham Ibn Ezra* is a worthy attempt at rendering linguistically complicated poems into beautiful German rhymes. There were also others who tried their hand at translating, Ḥarisi, Immanuel, and other Spanish and Italian poets with more or less success.

Dramatic production also occupied a place in German Jewish literature. Ludwig Philippson, who contributed to almost every branch of literature, did not neglect the drama. He wrote several tragedies on Biblical and historical themes, such as *Jojachin*; *Die Entthronten* (The Deposed), and *Esterke*. The themes of the first two are taken from the lives of Jehoiachin, the Judean king exiled to Babylonia, and of Gedalyah, the Prince of Israel, appointed ruler after the destruction of the First Temple; the subject of the third is the beautiful Polish Jewish maiden who, according to the story became the queen of Poland as the wife of Kasimir the Great. Other historical dramas are *Die Hasmoneer*

by Leopold Stein; *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems* by Julius Kasarski; *Aben Esra* by M. B. Landau; *Bar Kochba* by M. Lewin; and *Herodes und Mariamne* by Berthold Baruch.

ii. Among the poets and dramatists, whose literary activity falls during the last fifty years, are to be noted Richard Beer Hoffman (1866), Stefan Zweig (1880), Franz Werfel (1890), Ludwig Strauss (1892), and Karl Wolfskehl. The first three made their mark in general German literature, as is well known, and only devoted a part of their efforts to Jewish literature; the last two are primarily Jewish poets.

Beer Hoffman's contribution to Jewish dramatic literature consists in his two Biblical dramas, *Ja'acob's Traum* (Jacob's Dream) and *Der Junge David*. In the first, the poet expresses his conception of the fate of the Jewish people and its destiny. The conception itself is not new, for almost every Jewish thinker who was not influenced by the national idea, promulgated it in one form or another, but the vivid and dramatic presentation of Beer Hoffman lends to it a new glory and endows it with a halo of exaltation. The theme is the Biblical episode of the flight of Jacob from his brother, Esau, who seeks to kill him because he stole his father's blessing, and Jacob's subsequent dream at Beth-El. Esau and Jacob serve the poet as symbols of two types of men; the former represents the man of affairs to whom material possessions are a necessary condition of life, one who takes the world as it is, as a place of struggle for power and wealth; the latter is the man of spirit, the searcher after God, the visionary, and one whose compassion for all sufferers is great and deep. The brief Biblical episode is embellished by the dramatist with a number of imaginary details. He has the brothers meet on a lonely hill in the dusk of a setting day, and there Jacob explains to Esau that they are both needed in this world and that the blessing he received from his father only entails a burdensome fate. Esau departs with a friendly feeling towards his brother and Jacob falls asleep and in his dream he sees angels descending and surrounding him. The archangel, Michael, promises him earthly prosperity but he rejects it and asks for the right to be God's emissary on earth. Michael then reveals to him the future of his seed who will bear God's message to all nations, even at the expense of great suffering to themselves. The angel Samoel or Satan warns him against such a fate and portrays the agony of his descendants through the ages. God himself then interferes and promises Jacob that He will never cast off his seed and will remember their suffering for His sake. The dramatist thus conveys the idea that Jacob's or Israel's

eternal pain is the very cause of his greatness and the reason for his survival. From his early entrance on the arena of history Israel has assumed a mission to proclaim the value of spirituality in the world, and he will continue to do so in spite of all difficulties and obstacles. As mentioned, the idea is not new, for it was pronounced numerous times before by the spokesmen of the Reform movement in the nineteenth century but the reaffirmation of the belief in the ideal message of the Jewish people at the end of the World War, a trying moment for Jewry, with such ardor and zeal and in beautiful poetic form, adds a new glow to it.

The second drama, *Der Junge David*, was published in 1933, the year when Hitler came to power. The spirit of the time is clearly evident in it. The David of the drama is neither the conquering hero of the Old Testament nor the Psalmist of tradition, but one who continues to bear the burden assumed by Jacob in his dream. Even his role as a rebel against King Saul is forced upon him and is not a matter of choice. In the last act in which his coronation takes place, he outlines his view of the task before him as king and ruler of Israel. He does not want to build up an empire based on force and oppression but desires peace and an opportunity to implant in his people a new faith, one which will convince them that their own happiness depends on that of other peoples and that oppression or enslavement of neighbors breeds only misery for themselves. The numerous monologues and dialogues in which these ideas are expressed also contain vigorous protests against the racial and ultra-nationalistic views of the time and the poet continually emphasizes his belief in the destiny of the Jews to act as the messenger of peace and justice. Nor does he despair of the hope that when the nations of the world will ultimately tire of their grim task of making wars, they will accept Israel's message and will enter upon a new era in history.

The dramas of Beer Hoffman represent an attempt to arouse the conscience of humanity to the rampant evil of the time, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to encourage his brethren in a crucial hour of their history, to bear the burden of their destiny with fortitude and resolution.

This evident tendency does not, however, impair their artistic value. Both the technique and the character portrayal and analysis are of high quality. Of special interest is the tragic role of King Saul which is the burden of the first act and which is presented in a masterly fashion.

Similar ideas are expressed by Stefan Zweig in his Biblical dramatic

poem, *Jeremiah*. This poem was written in the years 1915-1917 in the midst of the World War and its motives are peace and the destiny of the Jews. The tragic prophet, Jeremiah, is the principal character. The great struggle which goes on in his heart when he is forced by the hand of God to pronounce the doom of the city and the people he loves is portrayed in its full pathos, but emphasis is laid on the above-mentioned motives rather than on the tragedy. Jeremiah is the only one in Jerusalem who counsels peace with Babylon, while the mob, the king's counselors and the priests howl for war. He is derided, laughed at, and even beaten for his council, but undismayed he denounces the horrors of war and advises King Zedekiah to submit to all humiliation rather than bear the responsibility of the consequences of conquest by the ruthless enemy. When his advice remains unheeded, he utters his dire prophecy of disaster. When the prophecy comes true and the Temple and city lie in ruins it is then that Jeremiah appears to us in full glory. At first he is overcome by the tragedy to such a degree that he denounces the God of Israel to whose service he had devoted his entire life for His indifference to the fall of His chosen people. Soon, however, the vision of the future unrolls before him, and he tells the exiles to cease mourning, for eternity is the destiny of their people and the conquered will outlive their conquerors. Their very suffering, pain, and agony will constitute the source of their power. The author thus voices through the mouth of Jeremiah whom he turned from a prophet of wrath into one of comfort, his belief in the survival of the Jew in spite of all tribulations. And it is this belief, expressed in glowing poetic passages, which endows the dramatic poem with permanence and value.

In *Paulus unter den Juden*, Franz Werfel undertook to dramatize the moment when primitive Christianity separated itself definitely from the Judaism which gave it birth. That moment according to the dramatist was when Paul left Jerusalem, whither he returned from Damascus after being converted to the new faith, to carry his message to the Gentiles. Werfel makes Paul attempt to convert his former teacher Gamaliel to his views, and he devotes his last scene almost entirely to a debate between the two. It is this scene which justifies the title, for in the preceding scenes Paul hardly appears. The bulk of the drama is devoted to a portrayal of the setting for the climax. Nor is Paul, in spite of the title, the principal character, for that role belongs to Gamaliel. We hear little of the views of Paul, nor do we get a deeper insight into his personality and the change that came over him, than we obtain

from other sources. It is Gamaliel who impresses us with his stirring words in defense of the Torah and Law, both of which Paul repudiated. "Love," says he, "is pure emotion and without a definite form of life in which it is realized can accomplish nothing. Jesus overthrew the tables of the money changers in the Temples but the next day they were there again." It is the Law which supplies stability to the good in life and makes it possible to change the evil nature in man. It is this defense of the Law as well as the portrait of Gamaliel which shines forth from the halo of glory which the poet cast around him that imparts value to the drama.

Strauss, one of the younger Jewish-German poets, sings in his collection of poems, *Land Israel*, of the beauty of Palestine and of the woes, hopes, and aspirations of his people. The collection is divided into two parts. The poems of the first part are nature poems in which the beauty of the Palestine landscape in all its moods and in all times is sung of. Mountains and valleys, the Dead Sea, wild flowers of the plains, the parched sand dunes in the heat of a summer noon, and the hovering clouds on a winter morning—all find their poetic description. In the second part which has as a subtitle *Not und Hoffnung* (Misery and Hope), the echo of the sad events in German Jewry in the last years is heard, but there is no despair, for the hope of a rebuilt Zion is fluttering before the poet and its spirit permeates his songs.

Wolfskehl's small collection of poems, *Die Stimme Spricht* (The Voice Speaks), strikes a new note not only in recent German Jewish poetry but in modern Jewish poetry in general. It is the note of deep religiosity. In his poems is heard the voice of a soul pleading, like the Psalmist of old, for the nearness of God. There is genuineness to his song, for the soul of the singer is filled with trust and faith in the promise of God that He will not forsake His people, and he hears within himself the voice of old Israel which always called upon God for help in the hour of need. It is this voice in whose name the poet calls to his suffering brethren in Germany in their dark hour to repent once more and find salvation in their faith.

83. RUSSIAN JEWISH LITERATURE

Unlike the German Jewish literature, the literary expression of the Jews in the Russian language was delayed until the second half of the nineteenth century. Not until 1860 did any works of Jewish content

and of literary significance appear in that tongue. It took a long time until the combined efforts of the enlightened and the government to spread secular knowledge among the Jews bore fruit. But gradually there arose a large number of younger Jews and Jewesses conversant with the Russian language who constituted a reading public and felt a need for literary productions in Russian. This need was primarily felt in the southern provinces of Russia, where the Jews were in closer touch with the general life and where the spirit of assimilation which had made its appearance in the circles of Jewish intellectuals, graduates of universities, and other government schools, was in strong evidence.

The need, however, was not an aesthetic but a political and social one, for it received a great impetus from the hope for emancipation, which arose in the hearts of the Jews during the late fifties, the first years of the liberal reign of Alexander the Second. It was because of this hope that the beginnings of the Russian Jewish literature were made, not as with the other Diaspora literatures, in the field of belles-lettres, but in that of publicistic and periodical publications.

In 1860, Osip Rabinowich (1817-1869) established at Odessa the Russian Jewish weekly *Razswyet* (The Dawn) in which he championed Jewish emancipation. Rabinowich was wholly engrossed in his task and cared little for other Jewish problems. Yet he could not publish a weekly without including some features of a lighter nature than articles dealing with emancipation, such as short stories, poems, and feuilletons, and as a result these made their appearance. In fact, Rabinowich himself wrote a number of stories, in which he pictured Jewish life under the reign of Nicholas I, with special reference to the sufferings undergone by the young recruits whose terms of service lasted half their life time.

The *Razswyet* was followed by the *Zion* in 1861 edited by Soloveitchik and Leon Pinsker, who later became a champion of the national movement. The very title of the periodical indicated a change in attitude. The weekly was devoted to the defense of the Jews against the attacks of anti-Semites as well as to arousing interest in Judaism and Jewish history. The efforts were praiseworthy but unsuccessful, and within a few years both weeklies ceased publication. Another weekly the *Dyen* (The Day) began to appear in 1869, in the same city, and like the *Razswyet* made emancipation its goal. It was wholly dominated by the spirit of Russification which saw the solution of the Jewish problem

in the saturation of the Jews with the Russian culture. However, even the *Dyen* was short-lived, for it ceased publication in 1871. Still the seeds sown by these abortive periodicals bore fruit, for interest in a Russian Jewish literature was quickened among the intellectuals and the enlightened. Moreover, the number of readers also increased in the measure that secular education continued to spread among the Jews in the course of time. There arose, therefore, novelists and short story writers and also a few poets.

The spirit dominating the entire Russian-Jewish literature in its early period was that of assimilation in a greater or lesser degree. Both publicists and writers of fiction preached not only enlightenment but Russification. Jewish life was, on the whole, pictured in dark colors and the cry for change and for the introduction of new cultural values was loud. Only towards the end of the seventies when, on the one hand, the disappointment with the results of the Haskalah became marked and, on the other hand, the hope for emancipation was lessened did that literature alter its tone and purpose. At that time the center of literary activity in Russia was removed from Odessa to St. Petersburg where there were concentrated the best intellectual and literary forces as well as the leading financiers and industrialists who undertook to guide the political and social activities of Russian Jewry. In 1878 S. Berman established the weekly, *Ruski Yevrei* (The Russian Jew) which was first edited by Zebi Rabinowitz and later by Dr. J. L. Kantor (Sec. 47), both of whom were also Hebrew writers. A short time afterwards the second *Razswyet* was established by a group of young men who were much closer to Jewish life than the early publicists. The general purpose of these weeklies was to intensify Jewish consciousness, arouse interest in the hearts of the younger generation in Jewish life and its problems and to increase the knowledge of Judaism. The note of Russification was not entirely absent, but it was greatly modified. The ramified strivings of the weeklies and the broader programs called forth a diversified literary activity. Around these periodicals there gathered an illustrious group of literati. Besides Dr. Kantor there were the talented publicists, Michael Kulisher and Jacob Rosenfeld, both successively editors of the *Razswyet*, the novelists, Bogrov, Levanda, and Mark Warshawski, the poet, S. Z. Luria, the future historian, Dubnow, who made his literary debut in these publications, and many others. When Russian Jewry was overtaken by the pogroms and the persecu-

tions of the years 1881-1882, the *Razsvyet* became the organ of the nationalists who introduced a new note in Russian Jewish literature.

The old tendency of favoring assimilation was not entirely abolished in spite of the sad events. This tendency still found expression, though in a mild form, in the important monthly, *Voskhod* (The Sunrise), which was established by A. Landau at the capital, in 1881, and which continued to appear for over two decades. Landau belonged to the old school of Russian Jewish intellectuals trained in the liberal tradition of Russian literature of earlier years and he clung to it for the rest of his life. Still, he was anxious to strengthen Judaism by increasing Jewish knowledge. His monthly devoted much space to scholarly articles on Jewish history, literature, and thought and also to lengthy reviews of books, and he did not neglect belletristics. The *Voskhod* therefore fulfilled an important function in the development of Russian Jewish literature, concentrating around itself a group of the best Russian Jewish writers in all fields. It was in its issues that many important works, both of a belletristic and scholarly nature, were first published. There Dubnow published his history of Hassidism, his essays on Diaspora nationalism, and many other works and it was there that the leading Russian Jewish poet, S. Frug, published his numerous poems which were later collected in several volumes.

Once an impetus had been given to its development, Russian Jewish literature made great strides in the decade and a half before the World War. Part of this development, however, was due to the Zionist movement. During these years an extensive literature was created in the Russian tongue, and both original and translated works appeared in considerable numbers. Progress was also made in scholarly and scientific works resulting in important contributions to all branches of Jewish learning, the crown of which is the *Yevreiskaya Enziklopedia* (Jewish Encyclopaedia) in twenty-five volumes.

In conclusion, we can say that while the Russian Jewish literature did not produce great poets, with the exception of Frug, nor leading novelists, nor even scholarly works of first magnitude, yet its importance for the understanding of Jewish life and thought during the last sixty years is exceedingly great. It was not a secluded literature produced by individual scholars and writers, like that of the German-Jewish works, but was close to life. It arose out of the need of large elements in Russian Jewry and through its extensive publicistic essays, and to a degree, also

through its fiction, reflected the conditions, needs, and hopes of that Jewry.

84. BOGROV, LEVANDA, AND FRUG

Of the numerous writers, both in prose and poetry, who helped to enrich the Russian Jewish literature during the second half of the nineteenth century, the following three were the most outstanding, the novelists, Gregory Bogrov (1825-1885), and Lev Levanda (1835-1888), and the poet, Simon Frug.

i. Bogrov, as his name indicates—it was originally Beharab, i.e. son of a rabbi—was a descendant of a family of rabbis, who followed the path to enlightenment and ultimately came to literature through a peculiar school which was saturated with a spirit of antagonism to traditional Judaism. This was the “school” of excise farmers in Russia during the reign of Nicholas I. Excise farming was for a time in the hands of a group of Jewish financiers who employed a large number of Jews as their clerks and representatives. These men being officers of the state and conversant with the Russian language belonged, as a rule, to the class of the enlightened. However, this enlightenment consisted mainly in the possession of a superficial secular education and a light attitude toward religious observance and toward Judaism in general. Due to their official status and to their higher economic position they exercised considerable influence upon the enlightenment movement and frequently not a beneficial one. The role of these excise officials as bearers of culture was described by many Haskalah writers in their stories. Such an enlightened official was also Bogrov and he was inoculated with the spirit of his group, displaying a negative attitude towards Jewish values. He reflected this attitude in his first novel, *Memoirs of a Jew* which was published in a Russian magazine in the years 1871-1872. The story, based on autobiographical material, pictures Jewish life during the first half of the last century in extremely dark colors. The picture is entirely vitiated by the author’s antagonistic spirit, which often turns into hatred for the ghetto-life of his brethren. The only true portraits in this gallery of scenes are those which depict the poverty and misery of the Jews in the small towns as a result of the persecutions of the government.

His negative attitude to Judaism and to Jewish values was partly redeemed by his pity for the fate of his brethren and his strong hatred of their persecutors. The first, as he himself explained in a letter to

Levanda, kept him for a long time in the fold, for he could not conscientiously forsake four million people suffering cruelly from a well-planned persecution. Yet, shortly before his death he embraced Christianity. His hatred of the persecutors of his people stimulated the writing of his second novel, *Yevreiski Manuscript* (A Jewish Manuscript), a story of the Jewish persecutions and massacres during the Cossack rebellion under Chmelnicki. It is there that he pours forth both his hatred for the torturers of his people and his sympathy for the sufferers. But even in this story, Jewish life is not glorified. Yet the tone of genuine bitterness against the fate of the Jew, the spirit of deep agony at their suffering which pervade the novel impart to it a considerable degree of interest.

ii. Lev Levanda, who was a prolific writer of fiction and very popular in his time, was of a different character and calibre. As a native and resident of Wilna, the center of Jewish learning in Lithuania, and as a graduate of the Rabbinical school of that city, his Jewish knowledge and contact with Jewish life were both deep and close. As a result, his attitude to Jews and Judaism was on the whole of a positive nature. During a large part of his life he was employed in the capacity of a "learned Jew" in the office of the governor general, and he was, as were most of the intellectuals of the day, animated by the spirit of Russification which expressed itself in a movement to bring the Jews as close as possible to the life and culture of the Russians. Yet he claims in several letters to Mordecai Kahn,⁸ written in the year 1885, that even at that time he was not an assimilator. On the contrary, he contends that he always preached the necessity of preserving Jewish values and always believed that the Jews should remain loyal and devoted to Judaism. But he also felt that they must be enlightened and must move closer to the Russian culture.

Be that as it may, his early sketches, short stories, and novels are permeated both with the spirit of enlightenment and of Russification. In his collection of short stories called *Sketches of the Past* in which he portrays Jewish life in the town, there is a marked note of ridicule of the old-fashioned life. The need for the Jew in Russia to strike root in the soil of the country and to consider it as a fatherland is the main motive of one of his important novels, *Goryachoe Vremya* (A Hot Time). It deals with the rebellion of the Poles against Russia in 1863 and the Jewish attitude toward it. The leading characters are

⁸ Mordecai Kahn, *Olami*, Vol. II, p. 6.

Pauline Kranz and Arcady Sarin; the first preaches alliance with the Poles, while the second champions not only loyalty and devotion to Russia, but also absorption of its culture and pursuit of its ideals—in short, cultural assimilation. The author undoubtedly identifies himself with Sarin. The same ideals are emphasized in his other novels.

The pogroms of the years 1881-1882 affected Levanda greatly. They not only shattered his ideology, but even unbalanced his mental equilibrium so that, at intervals, he was subject to attacks of insanity. During the last seven years of his life, he sympathized deeply with the national movement though he did not embrace its doctrine completely. His stories of that period are animated by an intense Jewish spirit. His best story of that period is perhaps the one entitled *Gniew-i-Milost Polskawo Magnata* (Anger and Mercy of a Polish Magnate). It relates the escape of the Jews of the town of Neswicz in Lithuania from the wrath of Prince Radzivill, lord of the town, who in his anger decided to destroy the whole community. In it Levanda portrays Jewish life in the early part of the eighteenth century with skill and great sympathy. Moreover, he expresses his appreciation of the great value which ceremonial observances have for the Jewish people, especially those of national significance, as the Ninth of Ab. "Indeed," he says, "a scattered nation which remembers its past and connects it with the present, undoubtedly will have a future as a people and probably even a more glorious life than the one in the past."

iii. Simon Frug who, as we have seen above (Sec. 73), distinguished himself as a Yiddish poet, rose to greater heights in his Russian poems. In Yiddish, hampered by the poverty of the language, and at times by the popular tone which he assumes, Frug occasionally becomes more preacher than poet. Moreover, his themes are limited either to bewailing the suffering of his people or to satirizing the faults of his brethren. In Russian, the general level of his poems is much higher and the themes more varied. It is in this language that he first expressed himself and continued to do so for the greater part of his life. There Frug is at his best.

The fundamental motive of his Russian poetry is the same as his Yiddish which is the national. In vain do we look for the expression of the poet's personal feelings, of his relation to nature or to love; they are not to be found. He is entirely overwhelmed by the tragedy of his nation and enchanted by the glory of its past, but he cannot see the future. The voice of the nation speaks through him. He turns for

comfort to the Bible and ransacks the treasures of the Agada and the Mediaeval legends for episodes and incidents around which he weaves a halo of poetic light and glory.

His poems, on the whole, are divided into three classes: Biblical and legendary, based on themes drawn from a Bible scene, or a prophetic statement, or an Agadic legend; lyrical, in which the poet utters his cry at the fate and suffering of his people; and narrative-historical poems, the motive of which is an historical episode taken either from the Bible or from Mediaeval lore. Frug hardly adds anything new to his themes; he does not elaborate them or recast them in his own mould, thus pouring new wine into old vessels; his strength lies in unfolding of the ancient thought, in recreating the beauty which lies dormant in the brief Biblical scene and giving it life and color, so that it emerges before us in full glory. With his rich imagination and poetic insight, he penetrates into the symbolic meaning of an Agadic story or statement and reveals the exaltedness of the thought, or the depth and extent of the emotion contained therein to their fullness. An illustration of his creative poetic insight can be found in his poem, *The Legend of the Cup*, the gist of which is as follows: Tell me, says the child to his mother, is it true that there is a cup in heaven which receives the tears flowing from the eyes of God at the suffering of Israel, and is it a fact that when the cup will be full the Messiah will come? It is true, answers the mother. But, asks the child, is it not yet full? Or does tear after tear evaporate and dry up, or is the bottom of the cup perhaps perforated? To this query no answer came, but a tear dropped from the eyes of the mother. The poet concludes with a prayer, "Oh God, place also this tear in thy wonderful cup, the cup of tears."

In his lyrics, he pours forth in fine measured verses his aching soul, the accumulated pain and sorrow of his heart at the suffering of his brethren which poisons his life and turns even the charms of nature to which he is so sensitive into bitter reminders of the plight of his people. In song after song, this wail of the nation is heard in deep pathetic tones. In his songs there is no wrath against the sufferers, no bitter irony as we find in Bialik, nor even a cry of vengeance as we hear at times in Tschernichowski, but merely a wail emerging from a loving heart. Yet, the wail is not only pathetic but full of meaning and possesses a peculiar charm of which the poem *To Prometheus* is a typical example. The poet, speaking on behalf of Israel, turns to the

ancient friend of man who stole the sacred fire from the gods for which he was punished severely and says: "Verily thou wast punished cruelly, but look at me, I did not steal the fire from God; He gave it to me and even ordered me to bear the torch to light the way of men in the dark. Yet what price did I pay for it? What then are thy sufferings compared with mine?"

Occasionally Frug sings lyrically of scenes or touching episodes in Jewish life which reflect the Jewish soul in its nobler aspect. Such a charming scene is revealed to us in the poem, *The Last Division* in which the bard tells in stirring manner of an act of love of a dying man who divides with his wife the last and most precious of his possessions. That wealth is a handful of dust from Palestine which he had brought with him from his visit to the Holy Land. He takes half of it to his grave and turns the other half over to her for future use. In this poem, not only the love of the Jew for Palestine is exalted but the pure and simple love of the Jewish husband and wife is portrayed in glowing manner.

The historical narrative poems are permeated with a deep spirit of pathos. They are distinguished by the recreation of the historical episode on an enlarged canvas with many embellishments. Of these poems, *Rabbi Amnon*, the subject of which is the fate of the Mediaeval sage, the supposed author of the liturgical poem, *U-Netane Tokef* (Vol. I, p. 245) who paid dearly for his momentary consent to conversion and later retraction, is most exquisite in its tragic beauty.

Frug sang of the Jewish past, of the suffering and martyrdom of Israel, and only seldom did he face the future. Only here and there, did his lyre emit tones of hope, but as a poet through whom the sorrow-laden soul of Israel expressed itself in song and who exalted the glory and beauty of the spirit of his people, he takes his place among the best singers of Israel through the ages.

Of the other Russian Jewish writers whose literary activity took place in the nineties of the last and in the first decade of this century, Ben Ami, the dramatist, S. Rapaport (S. Anski, Sec. 74), A. Eisman, and S. Yushkewich should be mentioned. The first distinguished himself with his short stories wherein he sympathetically portrayed traditional Jewish life, especially the celebration of the festivals in the ghetto. The second wrote novels in which the strivings of the younger generation are reflected. The last two dealt in their stories with the life

of the Jews in the large city and also echoed the effects of the pogroms in 1905 upon the Jewish communities.

85. FRANCO-JEWISH LITERATURE

Little was contributed during the greater part of the last century to Jewish literature by the other Jewries of Western Europe in the languages of their countries. There were a few poets in France who gave expression to their Jewishness in that language, distinguished among whom was Eugene Manuel whose collection of poems *Pagés Intime* (Intimate Pages), display a fine poetic spirit. There were also several dramatists who took Jewish themes for their plays. No less scanty was the literary contribution of Italian Jewry. There, as in France, there arose a few poets, a poetess, and a dramatist who sang and wrote with more or less skill. The most important among the dramatic writers was David Levi whose drama *Il Profeta* (The Prophet) made a great impression on his contemporaries.

These, however, were sporadic outbursts of literary expression, but on the whole, there was no continuous literary activity, especially in belles-lettres. The situation improved during the last fifty years, for there appeared in France a number of writers who in their stories and poems gave expression to the Jewish spirit. The most distinguished among them is Edmond Fleg (b. 1874). Fleg is master of several literary fields, distinguished as a writer of fiction, poems, and essays. The most noted of his numerous works are *La Vie de Moïse* (The Life of Moses) and *La Vie de Solomon* (The Life of Solomon), legendary and folkloristic biographies of these two outstanding men in the history of Israel. The task the writer set for himself was to reconstruct the lives of the great lawgiver and the wise king as they were reflected in the folk mind of the Jewish people through thousands of legends and tales.

He believed, as he tells us in the preface to the *Life of Moses*, that since the real life of Moses will never be known scientifically, then that life, in the form in which it was interpreted, imagined, and felt by Israel through the ages, has a right to be called History. For that purpose he not only ransacked the treasures of the entire Agada, but also created in its spirit and image some tales of his own. Out of the mass of tale, legend, and story he wove a colorful portrait of the life of Moses from his birth to his death, in which he intertwined not only the

vicissitudes of Israel from the Exodus to the entry into Canaan but also numerous pithy remarks, comments on, and interpretations of the important laws of the Torah, and observations on the fate and destiny of the Jewish people. The work, endowed with a poetic spirit and enhanced by the beauty of style which often parodies that of the Bible, possesses both charm and grandeur.

The Life of Solomon excels even the first work. Here the writer had a richer mass of tale and legend to draw upon, namely, those of the Arabs and other Oriental nations who, like the Jews, embellished the life of this king with many a story. In addition, the two Books of Wisdom, Proverbs and Koheleth, and the grand poem Song of Songs ascribed to Solomon supplied the author with data for the portrayal of his character. The book is distinguished by its harmonious construction. It is built around three epochs in the life of the monarch: from childhood to the moment when he reaches the height of his glory; his decline, when, lured by pleasure, he gradually forsakes the ways of God, and is in consequence, according to the legend, overthrown by Asmodeus, Prince of Demons, who usurps his place on the throne and sends him into exile; and finally, his repentance and ultimate return to the throne. The chapters assigned to each of these epochs tell the events with much beauty, each legend and tale falling neatly in its place and the whole representing a grand mosaic of many colors and hues. Especially skilful is his intertwining of passages from the Song of Songs, proverbs from the Book of Proverbs, and pithy sayings from Ecclesiastes, which not only blend harmoniously with the recital of events but throw new light on these books, and make the wisdom of life contained in them more intelligent to the modern reader.

The work as a whole forms one of the gems in world literature. Both biographies were translated into English and also into several other European languages.

Fleg also wrote a poem, *Le Mur des Pleurs* (The Wall of Wailing) in which the tragedy of the Jews is presented with remarkable vigor and tragic pathos.

86. ANGLO-JEWISH LITERATURE

Jewish literature fared better in England. English Jewry which was destined to play an important role in the affairs of world Jewry in later days, manifested a spirit of wholesome conservatism and a devotion to traditional Judaism. The spiritual storms which raged in the

Jewries of Central Europe during the greater part of the nineteenth century hardly affected the Jews of England, and the spirit of reform made little progress there. As a result, English Jewry always entertained an interest in Jewish literature but that interest, on account of the small number of Jews and the narrowness of life, expressed itself primarily in religious and ethical forms. For a long time little of a secular nature was produced in that country. However, around the middle of the last century, there arose a novelist of considerable talent, Grace de Aguilar, a scion of a Portuguese family. She wrote a number of historical novels taken from the life of the Marranos, the most important of which is the *Vale of Cedars*, a story based on an episode in the life of the Crypto Jews in Spain during the fifteenth century. There is vivid description of the environment and historical background in the work and it is pervaded by a spirit of genuine Jewish sentiment, but it is not at all distinguished by psychological analysis of the personalities of the characters. In its time it was very popular and many a Jewish girl shed copious tears over the sad fate of the hero or heroine. It was also translated into Hebrew by A. S. Friedberg with some additional features which enhanced its literary value.

87. ISRAEL ZANGWILL

The frightful economic and political conditions of the Jews of Eastern Europe during the second half of the last century, which caused a large number of them to leave their native countries, also brought thousands to England in search of freedom and better modes and ways of living. Ere long, almost all the large cities of the British Isles had considerable aggregates of immigrant Jews, of which that of London was the largest. As with all immigrant groups suddenly transplanted to a new environment in multitudes, the process of adjustment and adaptation to a new life by the newly-settled Jews was slow and gradual, and as a result large and small ghettos were formed in a number of cities. Life in these ghettos was of a peculiar and multi-colored nature. It was not of the old type of the East-European town for it was immediately affected by the forces of the environment, nor was it of the type of life of the native English Jewry for the immigrants were separated from their more fortunate brethren by a gulf which had to be bridged over a period of many years. It was a life in transition, partaking of many qualities and subjected to many influences. On the one hand, the groups of new immigrants

strove, for a time at least, to maintain the pristine form of life of the ghettos they came from, and endeavored to conform to ancient usages as much as possible. On the other hand, the influence of new conditions, both economic and cultural, the rise of a young generation educated in the public schools of the new land, and finally the influence of the native English Jews with whom the new settlers came in contact and who served them as models of assimilation—all these tended to change the life of the ghetto, to divert it into new channels and infuse it with new colors. Besides, this new settlement was not homogenous in population, but extremely heterogenous. There were Jews from all lands of Eastern Europe, and also smaller groups from Holland and Germany. Each group differed in dialect—although almost all of them spoke Yiddish—manners and customs, and to a degree even in matters of religion. Not only were there minor diversions in religious observances and attitudes towards religious conceptions originating in the former lands of settlement, but currents of radicalism and free thinking made their way into that life, inasmuch as liberal spirits from all countries flocked to the new land in the hope of carrying on their activity unhampered. The ghetto thus represented a huge melting-pot in which two forces were operating, one which endeavored to fuse various elements of different Jewries into a more or less homogenous population, and the other which covered them all with an alloy of the culture of the land and gradually adjusted them to the environment, enabling contingents of the older immigrants and their children to leave the ghetto and amalgamate with the native English Jewry. If we add to these forces and factors also that of poverty resulting from maladjustment and the struggle for existence, which went on among the various layers of settlers, we can have a conception, though an imperfect one, of the kaleidoscopic panorama which the life of the immigrants presented in the eighties and early nineties of the last century.

The establishment of a ghetto with its multi-colored but seething life in London as well as in other cities, also infused new vigor into the old and staid English Jewry. As a result there arose greater interest in Jewish literature, for life demands expression, and where it is surging and flowing, changing in movement and color, its reflection in literature is bound to come, and before long the kaleidoscopic ghetto of Britain found its master artist and portrayer. This was Israel Zangwill (1864-1918).

Zangwill was born in London, but soon after his birth, his parents

moved to Bristol where he attended a general school. However, they did not stay there long, and on their return to London they settled in the proximity of the new ghetto which began to form in East London. Young Israel then attended the Hebrew Free School which was a kind of parochial school where both Jewish and general education was imparted. He later became teacher in the same school and simultaneously studied at the university. His training and teaching in the Hebrew Free School where he acquired a certain amount of Jewish education, as well as his life among his brethren equipped him for his future task of portraying that life. He soon turned from teaching to literature, and after writing several novels of a general character which made an impression in English literary circles by their quaint humor, he turned his attention to the world he knew best and began the series of Jewish novels and short stories which he continued to produce during the greater part of his life. Zangwill was a prolific writer and he distinguished himself not only as a novelist and story writer but also as a poet, dramatist, and essayist. He never relinquished his activity in general literature and continued to write short stories on themes drawn from English life and also a number of dramas which were produced, with varying success, on the stage. But his genius expressed itself primarily in novels and stories of Jewish life. These began with *The Children of the Ghetto* published in 1892, followed by the *Ghetto Tragedies* in 1893, *The King of Schnorrers* in 1894, *The Dreamers of the Ghetto* in 1898, and *Ghetto Comedies* in 1907.

It often happens with prolific authors who express themselves in numerous works and who display great talent in diverse directions that their first work is the best, in spite of their comparative youth at the time of its composition, and so it is with Zangwill. He displays skill and talent in all successive works, but it is *The Children of the Ghetto* on which his fame rests. In this work he is not only the portrayeur of the new ghetto, of Jewish life in transition, in flux, in the process of change, but also its poet. It is a forerunner of all his other works, for in it, we have comedy and tragedy, mirth and sorrow, and numerous other nuances and shades of life combined in one picture, the canvas of which is the Jewish quarter in London.

The Children of the Ghetto is not a novel in the proper sense of the word, but in reality a gallery of pictures drawn from life. The number of its characters is exceedingly large and they represent all groups. There pass before us the staunch old guardians of the pristine form

of life who had come from across the sea and their young who rebel against the bonds of an ancient life with which they have no sympathy and which they endeavor to escape; then there are the radicals and the free thinkers who attempt to persuade their fellow Jews to emancipate themselves from the shackles of religion and along with it to break the chains of economic enslavement; and side by side with them appear the dreamers of a national revival of Israel, the forerunners of the Zionists who unite themselves into a Holy Land League. We see the seamy side of that life, the dire poverty of Whitechapel which stunts every effort at growth, but we also see the heroic struggle and ultimate success of a number of the sons and daughters of the ghetto in overcoming all obstacles. All these portraits in which different characters play their parts are united by the hand of the master through diverse threads into one all-embracing panorama.

The work begins with a little tragedy, the breaking of a pitcher of soup, supplied by the free kitchen, by little Esther Ansel, at the very moment when five hungry mouths were watering at the thought of tasting that delicious food. The note of tragedy pervades the whole book, for scene after scene displays one phase after another of the grim life of the poor of the ghetto, full of struggle and of frustrated aspirations. The experiences of Esther and the Ansel family form a prominent part of the book, but not the whole of it. They serve more as a thread to unite the group of pictures than its backbone. Esther, though, typifies the indomitable spirit of the children of Israel which overcomes all obstacles, the patience to bear suffering, and the ever-rising aspiration to a higher and finer life. Side by side with tragedy there is comedy; numerous little comic incidents which a multi-colored life supplies by its very flow and complexity are masterfully interwoven in the narrative.

The great qualities of the book are its variety of portraits and the attitude of the author towards the world he describes. The variety is all-embracing. The ghetto passes before us in all moods—in week-day squalor and the noisy humdrum of the market place as well as in the festal array of the Sabbath and holidays, when even the dingy garrets assume an air of cheerfulness, in its hilarious Purim balls as well as in the ominous sullen meetings of the proletarians called for the purpose of organizing a strike against the exploiters, the struggling owners of tailor shops and cigar factories; and again, in the more peaceful but

enthusiastic meetings of the Holy Land League, or the tumultuous productions of the jargon players. The denizens of the new ghetto are thus revealed to us from all angles.

The attitude of the author is neither that of an apologist who sees all beauty and glory dressed in the garb of poverty and squalor, nor that of a preacher who points out the sore spots in that life and advocates improvement. He is both sympathetic and critical. He sees the dire results of poverty, ignorance, and superstition, but he sees still more the nobility of character, the purity of the religious belief and devotion, and the beauty of filial and parental love which are so prevalent in the ghetto. Baer Belcovich, the next door neighbor of the Ansel in No. I Royal Street, who runs a tailor shop, is greedy, for in his struggle for existence he has learned the value of money. He exploits his workers but at the same time he is generous with his money, lending it to needy friends without security, for he knows the pangs of poverty. All that he asks of his debtors is that they treat him to a glass of rum. Rabbi Shemuel Jacobs who ekes out a poor living by ministering to his congregation gives his coat to a beggar and his last half crown to pious Ansel who is perennially out of work. He is otherwise narrow in his religious conceptions and bars the happiness of his daughter, Hannah, by forbidding her marriage to her fiancé who is a Kohen because she had to be divorced from a young man who at a party had playfully placed a ring upon her finger and pronounced the marriage formula. A similar episode was made the subject of a vitriolic attack against the Rabbis by the poet, J. L. Gordon (Vol. III, Sec. 39), but Zangwill merely calls it the shadow of religion, and arouses our admiration for Hannah by making her give up her lover and suffer in silence without passing judgment on her father's rigorism. On the other hand, the aged Hyamses leave for America when they find out that their son, Mendel, cannot marry the girl he loves because he must support them. They brave the unknown future in a strange land in order that their son should be able to marry his beloved. An interesting character created or rather recreated by the author is the Hebrew poet, Pinchas Malchi Zedek—the prototype is said to have been Imber, the author of the *ha-Tikvah*. He appears in a tragi-comic role in many a picture in his numerous moods, all of which emphasize his extreme egoism and weakness of character. He typifies the many victims which the misguided Haskalah produced in the ghetto.

Thus, the kaleidoscopic panorama passes before us with its lights and shadows in this masterful work, fully deserving its name, *The Children of the Ghetto*.

In the sequel called *The Grandchildren of the Ghetto*, we have another gallery of pictures, more limited in scope and drawn from the life of the upper circle of English Jewry and from that of the former dwellers of the ghetto who had emancipated themselves from its narrowness, poverty, and squalor, though not from the lure of its spirit of idealism which had followed them beyond its confines. Two of the earlier characters, Esther Ansel and the student, Strelitske, are reintroduced. An event in the life of the former whose tragic experience opened the book also closes it, but in a far from tragic fashion, for the event is her engagement to a scion of a wealthy English-Jewish family, Raphael Leon. These characters, however, are not introduced merely as a bond of unity for the series of portraits, but for a different purpose, to contrast the mechanical piety and materialistic outlook of the aristocratic Jewish circles with the idealism of the ghetto which finds an outlet in the lives of some of its children. Esther, who had emerged from her old environment after having been adopted by a rich woman, moves in the higher circles, rebels against the Philistines of the new society, writes a book under an assumed name severely criticizing its life and manners, and as a result, leaves the home of her adopted mother and goes back to the ghetto, only to be saved from a life of suffering by her betrothal to Leon. Strelitski, who is now a successful Rabbi in a most fashionable synagogue, rebels, though, against the mechanical, lifeless religion of his parishioners and resigns his position in order to be free to preach a religion of universal import. Leon, the idealist aristocrat, bridges the two worlds, the stolid rich West End and the bubbling enthusiastic poor ghetto. By the betrothal of Leon and Esther, the author, consciously or unconsciously, symbolizes the desired union of the best qualities in the well-ordered Jewries with the aspirations, ideals, hopes, and dreams of those who dwell or dwelt in White-chapel.

In his *Ghetto Tragedies* and *Ghetto Comedies* Zangwill extended his canvas beyond the confines of London's East End to include episodes and incidents of Jewish life all over the world. English Jewry, though, both in its upper and lower strata is not left out and a number of stories portray the fundamental characteristics of the circles. As in *The Children of the Ghetto*, so in the other stories, the comic and the

tragic are not separated in spite of the titles. In fact, Zangwill states distinctly in his preface to *The Comedies* that he disregards the old definition which distinguishes comedy from tragedy by its happy ending, for many of his comedies do not end thus. Yet they are comical by their incongruity with reality and the unexpectedness of the events they portray. Incongruity and unexpectedness are the very elements of humor, and since Jewish life, due to its peculiarity and abnormality is replete with such incidents, it is no wonder that it furnishes the writers with themes which are simultaneously tragic and comic. This trait is masterfully depicted by the writer in a number of stories included in *The Comedies*, but especially in the *Jewish Trinity* and *Samoochorona* (Self Defense). In the first, the stolidity of the Jewish English aristocrats and their preposterous attitude to Jews and Judaism and their problems is artistically exposed in all its ludicrousness. Burstein, a famous artist, who had estranged himself from his brethren, is greatly impressed by the piety of a baronet named Ahrenberg who recites the grace after meals in the presence of many notable Christians, his guests, and he is especially moved by the words of the prayer regarding the rebuilding of Zion. As a result of this, he reflects upon the possibility of a Jewish revival and a restoration of Palestine and ultimately becomes a Zionist. Another result of the dinner is that the artist falls in love with Miriam Ahrenberg. He pays court to her and is found acceptable except for his Zionism. The daughter of the pious, rich Jew expresses horror at the possibility of living entirely among Jews. However, her scruples are gradually overcome by love, but when Burstein pleads his suit before the father the case is different. The pious aristocrat displays his narrowness and bigotry in a ludicrous manner. He avers simultaneously that he is a British patriot, a devoted Jew, hoping for the Messiah and restoration of Zion, and yet he bitterly opposes the Palestinian movement on the ground that the Jews are incapable of government in spite of the fact that they supplied premiers to other nations. Burstein, exasperated, finally despairs of his suit and calls the pious magante a Jewish trinity, for he is a British patriot, a Jewish patriot, and an anti-Semite all in one. Comical and incongruous as the horror of living among Jews entertained by Miriam and the arguments of Ahrenberg appear to be, they also display a note of tragedy, the tragedy not only of men and women who live in two worlds and are not adjusted to either, but also of the Jewish people as a whole whose best children act in such an unnatural manner.

In *Samooborona*, the scene is shifted to a city in Russia on the eve of a pogrom. A member of the committee for self-defense from a near-by city comes there to organize the Jews for their own defense in the expected pogrom, but wherever he turns he finds deaf ears. The Orthodox abhor the idea of handling arms, and the liberals of the younger generation are all engrossed in their parties which are almost as numerous as the individuals constituting them. There are Polish Socialists, Social Democrats, Constitutionalists, Territorialists, Poalé Zion, Bundists, Zionists of all shades, and their initials are confusing and bewildering. The pogrom comes and the results are tragic, but the existence of numerous parties, the meaningless babel of slogans, the concern of the poor defenceless Jews for all nations and for all humanity except for themselves, are ludicrous, and the grim humor is portrayed by a master hand.

In *The Tragedies*, the stories deal primarily with episodes in the life of the individuals which are tragic in their essence and in their conclusion, because they struggle against cruel fate or destiny. Still, even here, we meet a note of humor placed there by life itself. Such a tale is *The Diary of a Meshumed* (Convert), in which a convert of forty years standing suddenly begins to yearn for his ancient faith and former brethren. But the more he yearns, the more he grieves at his son whose Christianity and anti-Semitism become ever more fanatical. The son, though, is not aware of his father's feelings, and they each go their own way. The father moves to Odessa and turns Jew and the son becomes editor of the *Novoe Vremya*, the leading anti-Semitic journal. The result is that the father dies in a pogrom instigated by the journal of his son. Tragic enough, yet it is incongruous and ironical. However, it is not pure phantasy, for not only have sons of converts become enemies of their race, but even pious Jews have had children or grandchildren who were anti-Semites. Such is the tragedy of Jewish life. A tragedy of immigrant life is skilfully depicted in *The Promised Land*. A Polish-Jewish bride finally arrives in America, the promised land, after she had been returned several times, and finds her fiancé married to her younger sister who had preceded her by a year and whose passage had been paid by her. Very pathetic is the story of a paralytic woman whose husband ceases to visit her at the hospital because of an affair with another. When she ultimately finds out, she, in spite of her pain at his infidelity, insists on a divorce in order that he may not sin daily and asks to see the *Ketubah* of the second wife to

convince herself of the marriage. This tragedy emphasizes the fine trait of sacrifice for the welfare of the beloved which is so common in the Jewish woman. Both the suffering and the sacrifice are portrayed with sympathy and with fine insight.

In *The King of Schnorrers*, Zangwill again widens his horizon, not in space but in time, by portraying a type and section of life of eighteenth century Jewry. In Menasseh Buena Abidu de Costa, the proud and most resourceful Portuguese Jewish beggar, the author created a literary type which can take its place by the side of a Falstaff or similar celebrities. This beggar, who tyrannizes the people from whom he solicits alms, and who even has contempt for Grubstuck, the rich leader of the Ashkenazic community who is exceptionally generous to him, because he is not a Sephardi, is genuinely proud not only of his descent but even more of his profession. He considers begging a divinely instituted profession and himself a benefactor who condescends to save the donor from sin. Before his pride there cower even the mighty members of *Ma'amad*, the council of the Portuguese community, and he has his way with every one. His dignity is that of a veritable prince; he donates a hundred pounds to the synagogue, a sum unheard of in those days, and collects the sum from the rich members in as nonchalant a manner as possible. Moreover, he donates to the synagogue a sum of five hundred pounds, the interest of which shall go to a Portuguese beggar at the discretion of the donor and appoints himself the recipient. In short, begging to him is not only a means for making money, but an art in which he enriches his experiences of human nature and which he plies with perfection and with a certain amount of genius. The story is throughout permeated with a spirit of delightful humor.

While in all these stories Zangwill portrayed the reality of Jewish life, especially as reflected in the ghetto, he devoted his attention in his *Dreamers of the Ghetto* to its ideal aspect as reflected in the lives of distinguished individuals of the race in various lands and times. The work is a collection of sketches of the lives of extraordinary Jews who, saturated with the idealistic spirit of the race, either rebelled against the drab existence of their people and indulged in dreams and mystic vagaries for redemption, or broke new paths in thought or life for humanity as a whole. The series begins with Sabbatai Zebi and ends with Ferdinand Lassalle and includes Baruch Spinoza and such tragic figures as Uriel Acosta and Solomon Maimon, and also several un-

historical persons, such as Joseph the Dreamer. The historic setting is not always drawn accurately, but there is much art in the presentation of their characters and special emphasis is laid upon the bond of idealism which unites them all in spite of the diversity of their personalities, environment, and aspirations.

Zangwill, as said, was a versatile writer, and distinguished himself also as an essayist. During the many years of his literary and Jewish activity, he wrote essays on a wide variety of problems. The best of these were collected in 1921 under the title *The Voice of Jerusalem*. The title was derived, as he tells us in his preface, from a phrase once used by him in a letter to the London Times in 1914 in which he objected to the characterization of the Times of an appeal for peace by Jacob Schiff as "a brief for Germany" and insisted that it was "the voice of Jerusalem" which spoke in that appeal. In reality that title is applied to the first series of short essays but is extended to the book as a whole, for it is in fact the voice of true loyalty to Jews and Judaism symbolized by Jerusalem which speaks through all of the essays. The book, as a whole, is one of the finest apologetic works in the entire Jewish literature. The writer is convinced of the tragic glory of Jewish history and of the effectiveness of the influence of the Jewish spirit upon the elevation of humanity during the ages in spite of all persecutions aiming to annihilate the people of Israel. The small still voice of Jerusalem was heard, *volens nolens*, notwithstanding all attempts to deafen it. Furthermore, he believes that the voice still has some important message for humanity provided the opportunity be given to the Jewish people to proclaim it. These are the fundamental notes of the diversified essays included in the book. The bulk of it consists of two series, one to which the title of the book is properly applied, and the other called *The Legend of the Conquering Jew*. In the first, the essays of which are rather loosely connected, the author speaks not with one voice but with many. At times, he is polemic and condemns the European nations for their lust for war and conquest, the degradation of Christianity, the atrocities against the Jews; at other times he is apologetic, combating the numerous false theories of the character of Judaism put forth by thinkers and philosophers who claim objectivity, such as H. G. Wells and others. He attributes the cause of intellectual anti-Semitism partly to the unconscious sense of indebtedness felt by the Christian world to Judaism, and in many more ways defends Jews and Judaism against their maligners. Zionism and the fate of the

Jewish people in the post-War world occupy a prominent part in this series. Curiously enough, writing only a year or two after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, Zangwill foresaw the difficulties in the way of the realization of the Jewish homeland with remarkable clearness, especially the Arab opposition. He, therefore, expresses dissatisfaction with the Declaration and even suspects the leaders of the English government, who succeeded Balfour, of insincerity. He boldly labels the promised Jewish state a mirage, for in his opinion a Jewish minority cannot have a home amidst a majority of Arabs. He suggests either a mass emigration of Arabs to other countries, or if this is impossible, the surrender of the government of Palestine to a Jewish minority for the purpose of converting them to a majority. Otherwise, he claims, the Declaration is meaningless. Unfortunately, his forebodings have come true. As a result of his analysis of Zionism he still advocates in these essays the territorialist idea that he championed in the decade before the War, though he offers little of a definite solution in that direction.

The second series is a splendid defense of the Jews against anti-Semitism which was at the time showing its ugly head or rather heads in numerous books, ranging from quasi-scientific works to the notorious *Protocols of Zion* which were issued in 1920 under the title *The Jewish Peril*. He reduces *ad absurdum* the stock phrases, "the conquering Jew" or the "formidableness of the Jews" constantly repeated in the anti-Semitic works of all types. With remarkable irony he points out that the titles are justified only in two ways, namely, the Jew can be called a conqueror, inasmuch as he conquered all persecution and attacks, and his formidableness is expressed in the imposing mass of contributions to science, philosophy, art, politics, and other fields of civilization.

The essays undoubtedly bear the signs of the times in which they were written, yet many of them, due to the scholarship, the logical way of thinking, the deep pathos, the fine ironic humor by which they are distinguished, and above all by their splendid style, have permanent value. Zangwill's contribution to Jewish apologetics thus does not fall far behind his great contribution to belles-lettres.

88. OTHER NOVELISTS

Of the other Anglo-Jewish novelists Samuel Gordon (1871-1927) and Louis Golding (b. 1895) should be mentioned. The first has

to his credit a novel, *The Sons of the Covenant*, and several collections of short stories. The novel, like Zangwill's stories, portrays Jewish life in the London ghetto in the nineties of the last century, but unlike the former, he does not present it in all its aspects, nor does he lay bare its spirit. The ghetto to him is more of a sociological problem than a kaleidoscopic panorama of Jewish life and the solution to that problem is a leading motive of his story. The two principal characters of the novel, the brothers Phil and Lew Lipcott, who had found their way out of the ghetto, the former through his scholarly attainments, and the latter by his indomitable will to succeed in the business world, discuss in many pages, the situation of their less fortunate brethren. They come to the conclusion that the ghetto must gradually disappear, and the Jews must spread throughout the United Kingdom, and turn their hand to a variety of occupations, and not as in Whitechapel, monopolize a few trades. They finally establish an institution for the purpose of helping the younger generation to better adjust themselves to their environment.

In his shorter stories he depicts Jewish life in Russia with which he seems to have been fairly well acquainted. In their totality, the stories present a fair cross-section of Russian Jewish life before the War, drawn with skill and described with sympathy.

Golding is a prolific writer who has composed a number of novels dealing partly with Jewish life, among them *The Five Silver Daughters*, *Magnolia Street* and *The Day of Atonement*. The life he portrays is that of the Jews in a town of North England which he calls Doomington. In the first novel he chronicles the fortunes of the Silver family, of the parents and their five daughters during two decades from 1910 to 1930. In this chronicle, the miraculous abounds. The elder Mr. Silver who, at the beginning of the story is a poor working man ends up as a millionaire industrialist; his daughters, likewise, find their way in the world and become great ladies, one as the wife of an important commissar in Soviet Russia. It seems that the purpose of the author was to depict the disintegration of Jewish life in the provincial cities and towns of England, outside of the large centers. The characters, mostly young people, display little Jewishness, and in fact, the story would suffer little if they were Russians or Germans or belonged to any other people. From time to time, as if to add some Jewish color to the story, the author intersperses a few sentences about the synagogue in the town and the people who visit it.

The same can be said about the Jewish part in the second novel, *Magnolia Street*. In reality the book is not a novel but a series of sketches of episodes in the lives of a number of families, both Jewish and Gentile, who happen to live on one street. In this complex of stories, the Jewish characters are only Jews by name. Intermarriages abound, morality is lax, and all without any struggle and revolt. There is, however, art in the story, for the author pictures with great skill the gradual bridging of the gulf between the dwellers on the two opposite sides of the street, the Gentiles and the Jews, who through sharing common experiences for two decades, especially through the effects of the War, have drawn nearer and almost merged into one large family, that of Magnolia Street.

The theme of the third novel is an exotic one. It is the tragic story of an immigrant family, the head of which had turned Christian and had been killed by his own wife when with cross in hand he preached his new faith in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement. Their little son disappeared after the tragedy and later became a goatherd in Sicily. The author tells the story of the family at length, giving the Russian background, concatenating many circumstances in a forced way. It is possible that Golding drew his characters from life, the disintegrating life of a small Jewish community in the midst of a strange environment, but at best he only touches its external phase, which is more of a negative than of a positive character. In fact, almost all the characters are gross materialists with the exception of a Mr. Emmanuel who appears in several novels and who is the only idealist. Golding's contribution to Jewish literature is by no means too large.

